

WASHINGTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF
RECORDS MANAGEMENT
AND ARCHIVES

NINTH ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021



Donna Cox Briggs, Archives Associate, and County Archivist Ned Irwin place Deed Book A, the county's original deed book returned from the Tennessee State Library and Archives after 124 years, on its shelf in the department's vault, Tuesday, June 1st, 2021.

Submitted by
Ned Irwin
County Archivist and Records Manager
July 2021

WASHINGTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES
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By the Numbers

The following is the county archive year (July 1st, 2020-June 30th, 2021) by the numbers:

- 276,681.96 = revenue dollars raised by the archive filing fee. See page 2.
- 241,485 = dollars appropriated in the department budget. See page 2.
- 75,139 = number of views of department website. See page 12.
- 49,738 = court cases that have been processed to date. See page 8.
- 9,929 = linear feet of records housed in the archives.¹
- 7,053 = visitors to department webpage. See page 12.
- 6,581.16 = monies contributed by the Friends of the Archives. See page 14.
- 5,869 = boxes of county records housed in the archives.
- 2,887 = volumes of county records housed in the archives.
- 1771 = year of the archives' oldest document.
- 1,604 = number of reference inquiries handled. See page 11.
- 1,499 = number of hours contributed by others to the archives. See page 13.
- 659 = number of in-person researchers from 16 states. See page 11.
- 630 = number of volumes in Book Collection. See page 8.
- 473 = number of maps held. See page 10.
- 51 = number of media items about the archives.
- 260 = number of marriage license reference inquiries.
- 37 = number of states and districts from which reference inquiries were received: Tennessee, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and District of Columbia.
- 15 = number in attendance at public presentations given on the county archive. See page 11.
- 14 = number of volunteers. See page 13.
- 2 = number of foreign countries from which research inquiries were received. (England and Canada).

¹ This is the equivalent of 33 football fields in length!

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The department's year began in July 2020 in the midst of the great COVID-19 pandemic, a strange and difficult time for everyone. The impact this had on the archives will be examined in the course of this report. But, by the year's end in early summer 2021, the pandemic was moving behind us. Mask wearing was disappearing, and things were returning to normal. We find that this year of plague and problems was also for the archives a year full of momentous moments. The highlight came near the end when Washington County's first deed book was returned to us by Tennessee's governor and Secretary of State after an absence of 124 years. When Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett toured the archives on September 14, 2021, he could not have known that he would be back the following June 1st with the historic Deed Book A in his hands.

Financial Management

The department began the year with an annual operating budget of \$241,485. The department's budget has remained at the same relative level through the years (approximately \$240,000). The archive budget is funded by revenue raised through an archival filing fee applied to various county documents. Total revenue for 2020-2021 was \$276,681.96. This is an increase of \$41,663.60 over 2019-2020, indicative of the post-pandemic recovery. Any surplus revenue goes into a dedicated archive reserve fund. As of June 30, 2021, the reserve fund totals \$115,864.49.²

Building Management



² This is an unofficial number. The official and most accurate figure will not be available until the 2020-2021 financial records are closed and audited.

The department manages two facilities: the archive building itself at 103 West Main Street in Jonesborough and the Archive Annex in the former county jail space at the rear of the Washington County Courthouse. The first is a 1915 bank building renovated in 2015-2016, a perfect place for securing and preserving historic county records. The annex was constructed originally in 1964 as the county jail and renovated in 2012 and 2018-2019 as an archival storage facility, again a wonderfully secure place to preserve county records.

In January and March 2021, Barnard Roofing Company of Johnson City completed stone coping repair work on the roof line of the archive building to prevent leaking and potential water damage. This work was originally intended to be part of the 2015-2016 building renovation but had to be dropped when that project bid came in over budget. Total cost of this project was \$1,477.

In May 2021, chiller servicing was required to provide proper air conditioning to the archives building at the time of the seasonal change-over from heating the building to cooling the building. This work was done by S. B. White Company of Johnson City at a cost of \$310. The following month, the same company repaired a malfunctioning air unit at the Archive Annex (\$150).

The department was most pleased when on March 23rd, 2021, Jonesborough artist Peggy Root and her son Charles delivered the two remaining paintings (Fall and Winter) that were commissioned and paid for by the Friends of the Washington County Archives. These were hung in the Reading Room on March 31st, 2021 by Don and Jacob Muldoon. A total of four seasonal landscape paintings of selected Washington County scenes were painted by Root and are now on permanent display in the department's Mildred Spaulding Kozsuch Memorial Reading Room. These paintings do a lot to enhance the ambience of the space.

Archives Lobby Paintings



Spring



Summer



Fall



Winter

Collection Management

The department manages six distinct collections: County Records, Book Collection, Manuscripts Collection, Map Collections, Microfilm Collection, and Photograph Collection. These are discussed below:

County Records

The primary function of the department is the preservation of records created by the various offices and departments of Washington County government having permanent value. A secondary function of the department is arranging these records and making them accessible to anyone who may require their use. Archives staff work closely with office-holders and department heads to ensure records needing the care and attention of the archives receive it.

Recovery of County Records



Governor Bill Lee (right) and Secretary of State Tre Hargett (left) return the county's first deed book (Deed Book A) to Mayor Joe Grandy in front of the Washington County Courthouse in Jonesborough on Tuesday, June 1st, 2021, the 225th anniversary of Tennessee statehood.

For the past two years, the department has been actively engaged in recovering any Washington County records that for whatever reason were no longer in the county's custody. About 12,000 documents ranging from the 18th Century into the 20th Century have been recovered from a variety of institutions, as well as from private individuals. Most of these records were recovered prior to the start of this fiscal year. During 2020-2021, we recovered seven additional documents. While this seems a small amount compared to the 12,000-document total, these seven items were historically significant, and each was recovered from a major research repository.

It took the effort of many individuals over most of the past year to bring the documents home, and surprisingly all seven arrived within a couple of weeks' time near the end of the fiscal year. The most notable returned document was Deed Book A, the county's first deed book. It contains the earliest land records for what became Tennessee, covering the period 1775-1782, so actually beginning in the period of the Watauga Association prior to the creation of Washington County, when this area was still part of the British Empire!

The deed book had gone to Nashville in 1897 as part of the county's exhibit for Tennessee's centennial celebration. And, for whatever reason, it was not returned. In 2013, the county archivist began what became an eight-year effort to get the volume returned from where it was housed at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. From the very beginning County Mayor Joe Grandy lent his support, as had Mayor Dan Eldridge before him. In March 2019, the Public Records Commission endorsed the effort to recover all missing county records, including Deed Book A. On January 25th, 2021, the County Commission unanimously adopted Resolution 21-0-13 officially requesting the return of Deed Book A by the TSLA. Our state legislative delegation of Senator Rusty Crowe and Representatives Rebecca Alexander and Tim Hicks then led the effort in Nashville to have the book returned, enlisting the unanimous support of the Northeast Tennessee Caucus in the cause. The caucus is composed of all the members of the Tennessee General Assembly representing all the counties this side of Knoxville. County Attorney Allyson Wilkinson's legal talent proved invaluable in dealing with the legal team at the Secretary of State's office.

All this effort came to a successful conclusion when on Tuesday, June 1st, 2021, Governor Bill Lee and Secretary of State Tre Hargett personally returned Deed Book A to Mayor Grandy in front of the Washington County Courthouse in Jonesborough. This event served as part of the kick-off of a year-long celebration of Tennessee's 225th anniversary of statehood. Deed Book A now resides securely on a shelf in the bank vault of the Washington County Archives. I want to thank everyone who helped in getting the deed book returned, including a special word of thanks to my associate Donna Cox Briggs.

Somewhat overshadowed by the return of Deed Book A was the almost simultaneous return of six other documents the department had worked for over a year to secure. These documents are unique and historic in their own way. On May 21st, 2021,

three documents related to John Bayles' effort to emancipate "a slave named Jenny." were returned from the Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Then on June 10th, 2021, three documents were returned by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in New York City. The items included an 1801 court document signed by Andrew Jackson while serving in Jonesborough as a judge of the Court of Equity; an 1825 petition of David Nelson to emancipate two slaves named Sylvia and Alfred; and an 1845 court document related to the case of State vs. Zacheriah Allen.

What we are most proud of is that all 12,000 returned county records were returned voluntarily without having to go to court.

Additions To County Records

On August 21st, 2020, papers of former Clerk and Master Walter Saylor were added to Record Group 4: Clerk and Master Records. These documents were donated by Terry Ponder, Dianna Saylor Boarman, and Deborah Sue Saylor of Johnson City.

On September 3rd, 2020, Donna Cox Briggs donated a copy of the famous Tennessee State Supreme Court case Ford vs. Ford, a case originating in Washington County. This case file was added to Record Group 24: Tennessee State Court Records.

In November 2020, we discovered a previously unknown set of court records. This was processed as Record Group 26: Court of Oyer and Terminer and General Goal Delivery Records. This was the first court superior to County Court, covering the years 1782-1784. The court was replaced in 1785 by the Superior Court of Law and Equity. This small collection of records was processed and digitized and added to the "Digital Collections" on the website.

On March 18th, 2021, we discovered the original of Deed Book H among a miscellaneous box of records found originally in the County Clerk's basement. This volume (covering the years 1795-1799) was added to Record Group 15: Register of Deeds Records.

On May 27th, 2021, Chris Paper of the Zoning Department transferred seven maps and drawings to the archives, including the following: Cemetary (sic) Location Map, Washington County, Tennessee, 1986 (3 copies); Schools: Lamar Elementary and Middle School, Site Plan and Topographic Survey drawings by Ken Ross, Architects, Inc., 1995. (2 sheets), and Schools: South Central Elementary School, Site Plan and Grading Improvement drawings by Beeson, Lusk & Street, Inc., Architects, 1995. (2 sheets) These documents were added to the Record Group 23: Zoning Department Records.

Processing Projects



Volunteers Samantha Ellison and Sam Compton process Law Court records.

Several major processing projects of county records continued from last fiscal year. This included the continued incorporating of the nearly 12,000 county records recovered in 2019 into the appropriate record group locations. This is a rather monumental task since there was no arrangement of the records when received.

A long-term project to process Circuit Court case files held in the archives (1808-1949, with a few later case files up to 1965) was completed. This project began in November 2018 and finished in April 2021. A total of **24,183** civil and criminal court cases are now available to researchers, covering everything from debt to murder. The total records processed is 273 linear feet. A guide to this collection is found on the department's website. Also completed in the spring of 2021, were 189 Probate Court case files that are part of Chancery Court and cover the years 1867-1969. The total records processed is 27 linear feet.

Processing that began in 2017 continues for County Court Judicial case files. To date, files for the years 1778-1941 have been processed, for a total of 123 linear feet of records. Unprocessed records of this series continue into the mid-1950s. A guide to the files from 1778-1899 is available online on the archive's website.

Processing of Johnson City Law Court case files that began in 2018 continues. This is a division of Circuit Court held in Johnson City from 1891-2007. To date, case files for the years 1891-1955 have been completed, for a total of 138 linear feet. A guide is being created that will cover this time period and be available to researchers on the department's website. The guide should be completed before the end of summer 2021. Unprocessed records of this series continue to 1979 and continue to be processed.

A new project to process estate records began in May 2021. It is expected to be a multi-year effort involving the work of both staff and volunteers. Estate records will include inventories of estates, estate settlement records, administrator records, and executor records. These records are part of Record Group 4 (Clerk and Master Records), also a part of Chancery Court.

Guides are now available to several processed sets of court records, including: Chancery Court (1836-1942; 4,722 cases); Circuit Court (1808-1949 with a few later cases; 24,183 cases); County Court Judicial (1778-1899; 13,647 cases); Court of Oyer and Terminer and General Goal Delivery (1782-1784; 32 cases); Probate Court (1867-1969; 189 cases); Superior Court of Law and Equity (1784-1835; 1,544 cases); and Tennessee Supreme Court of Errors and Appeals (Jonesborough) (1804-1950; 175 cases). Johnson City Law Court (1891-2007) has 5,245 processed case files covering the period 1891-1951. However, the guide for this collection is not yet completed. For all courts combined, **49,738** cases have been processed since work began on these records in 2017. Court records are very useful to those doing genealogical research as well as for helping historians examining cultural and social issues, providing a local context to national issues. When one realizes that the number of names found in these cases is many more times that of the number of cases, researchers are likely to encounter ancestors involved in the county's judicial system at some point in time.

Scanning Projects

The effort to have pre-1800 records digitized continued with all pre-1800 marriage records being scanned and digitized in the summer/fall 2019) and put on website as a digital collection in summer 2020. At present, all pre-1800 marriages, wills, tax lists, as well as records from the period of the Watauga Association and the State of Franklin, are available to researchers on the department's website. These historic and fragile documents no longer need to be handled.

The records of an early and previously unknown court, the Court of Oyer and Terminer and General Goal Delivery (1782-1784), were processed and scanned, and are now available online at the department website's "Digital Collections" page. Also scanned and added to digital collections is the archives' photograph and postcard collections.

Book Collection

The department's reference book collection continues to grow. 64 books were added during the year, bringing the total books in the collection to **630**. This collection is relied on heavily by archive staff and is also available for use by those researching in the archives. Archive funds are not used to purchase books, so we are dependent on the kindness of others. The following donated books in 2020-2021: Friends of the Washington County Archives, Ellen Kitzmiller Bowman, Donna Cox Briggs, Bill Gann and Gary Toms,

Betty Jane Hylton, Shelley Jennings, Dr. Donald Shaffer, John Stemmons, Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett, and Richard Griffith and the Washington County Library.



Of particular interest was a six-volume set of Zella Armstrong's *Notable Southern Families*. This classic work provides detailed genealogical information on many prominent families that played important roles in Washington County and the region's history. This set was purchased on behalf of the archives by its' Friends group.

Manuscripts Collection

The department does not actively seek private papers of individuals or families. On occasion, such material is added to the Manuscripts Collection. This year five sets of personal papers found among the county records returned in the Paul Fink Papers from the McClung Collection in Knoxville were processed as individual manuscript collections: Blackston McDannel Collection (Accession 20); Joseph Dobson Collection (Accession 21); Josiah Conley Collection (Accession 22); Carmichael Family Collection (Acc. 23); and Bailey Family Collection (Acc. 24).

Eighteen historic postcards of the area were donated by Daniel Gregory of Manchester, Tenn., and added to the Postcard Collection (Acc. 16). Anne G'Fellers Mason of the Heritage Alliance donated a single blueprint from 1910 related to construction of the Ashe Street Courthouse in Johnson City that was found by her in the building's attic. It was processed as Ashe Street Courthouse Collection (Acc. 25).

Map Collection

No maps were added to the collection in 2020-2021. The collection now contains 473 maps in either physical or digital form spanning from 1828 to 2013.

Microfilm Collection

No microfilm was added to the collection in 2020-2021. The collection now contains 44 reels of microfilm related to the early history and settlement of Washington County and East Tennessee.

Photograph Collections

In June 2021, Ellen Kitzmiller Bowman of Jonesborough permitted scanning of nine historic photographs that had belonged to her mother Erma Kitzmiller related to Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church. The photograph collections now contain 51 images. Photographs span the years 1886 to 1985 and undated. Not counted here are any photographs found in manuscript collections.

Records Management

The department provides advice and assistance in the management of records to any requesting county office or department. During the year, we assisted the Benefits and Human Resources Office, and provided storage for county records from the following departments and offices: Assessor of Property, Benefits/Human Resources, Bookkeeping, Circuit Court Clerk, Clerk and Master, County Attorney, County Clerk, County Mayor, Juvenile Services, Register of Deeds, Sheriff, Trustee, Washington County Library, and Zoning. We continue to provide off-site backup storage for the Register of Deeds to assist them in complying with state law.

As an off-shoot of the research done to secure the return of Deed Book A from the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the county archivist created a written guide explaining the early county deeds books to benefit both the Register of Deed's office, as well as the general public.

A plan to conduct an updated records inventory of various county offices during the year was postponed because of the pandemic. The last major inventory was done in 2012-2013.

Reference and Public Service

A major development in reference service to the public began on June 1, 2020, when the archives began new and increased public hours for researchers. This increased the time the department's Reading Room is open by nearly 30%. The hours when the public can now visit the archives is Monday-Friday from 8:00-11:00 a.m. and 1:00-3:00 p.m.

A total of **1,604** reference inquiries was handled compared to 1,232 in 2019-2020. This represents a 30% increase, even in a year impacted by the pandemic. Inquiries came from **36** states and the District of Columbia: Tennessee, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and District of Columbia. That's four more states than were served in the previous year.

In-person visitors to the department's Reading Room totaled **659**. This was a decrease (of 9%) from 727 the previous year and shows the impact of the pandemic on travel, especially in the first three quarters of the fiscal year. Visitors began increasing in the late spring and early summer of 2021. The majority of visitors (616), as is to be expected, were Tennessee residents. There were 48 researchers from a total of 15 other states. The states represented were Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

In September 2020, archives' staff videotaped a segment for the United States Constitution Week Bell-Ringing event sponsored by the State of Franklin National Society Daughters of the American Revolution and Heritage Alliance in Jonesborough. (See image below.)



Constitution Week Bell Ringing — with Friends of the Washington County, Tennessee Archives and State of Franklin Chapter NSDAR Jonesborough, TN 11-2017.

September 21 at 9:45 AM · 🌐

Constitution Week Bell Ringing Pop-Up Christopher Taylor House

In celebration of Constitution Week, we're partnering with the State of Franklin Chapter of the NSDAR for pop-up bell ringings for Bells Across America. For this pop-up, we're at the Christopher Taylor House with the Washington County Archivists. The Christopher Taylor House was the recipient of a DAR preservation grant in 2018 that helped to put the new, cedar shake roof on the building. The Town of Jonesborough provided the matching funds for their historic building.

Comments

[See All](#)

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 📹 📺 📱

On February 17th, 2021, Ned Irwin addressed the Jonesborough Kiwanis Club (15 members present) via Zoom and discussed the archives and its' county record recovery project.

During the year, County Archivist Ned Irwin consulted and advised about the proposed Carter County Archives with the County Mayor's office, the Carter County Public Records Commission, and Scott Bowers, Carter County Historian. This is an on-going advisory effort on the part of department staff to assist our neighboring county in helping establish a county archives program.

The county archivist provided conservation advice to Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Johnson City regarding their charter document in May 2021. He also assisted a dissertation student at the University of Birmingham in England on her biographical study of Johnson City native Gwen Terasaki.

Website and Social Media

The department's website is the key resource to enable researchers to discover what is held in the archives. Its' use continues to expand. During the year, a total of **7,053** visitors conducted a total of **75,139** views of the department's website. This compares to 6,920 visitors and 68,365 views for the previous year, an increase of 2% and 10% respectively. The following is the link to that website, and it is hoped readers of this annual report will visit the site, too: www.wctnarchives.org.

Online researchers represented 36 different countries (up from 33 last year), as follows: Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Hong Kong SAR China, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar (Burma), Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam.

Several additions were made to the department's website during the year. This included expanded guides to various court records, including case files for Chancery Court (1836-1942), Circuit Court (1808-1949), County Court Judicial (1778-1899, Court of Oyer and Terminer and General Goal Delivery (1782-1784), Superior Court of Law and Equity (1784-1835), and Tennessee State Court Records (1804-1950). The collection of historic postcards was added, as well as additional images in the Photo Gallery.

There were 54 postings made to the Friends of the Washington County Archives Facebook page regarding archives' news, information, and interesting discoveries. A total of 23,264 individuals saw these posts. The most popular posting was the announcement about the return of Deed Book A. We have noticed that when a post is made, there is a definite increase in visitors to our website. Thus, social media is serving as a hook to bring potential researchers to our website, where they can find records to help in their research.

Staffing and Volunteers



Staffing remained the same during the year with the following employees: Ned Irwin (County Archivist and Records Manager), Donna Cox Briggs (Archives Associate), and Britney Helton (Archives Assistant, part-time). Both Irwin and Briggs published articles in the *Bulletin of the Watauga Association of Genealogists* during the year.

Volunteers play an essential role in the operations of the department. Their hands do the bulk of the processing on collections. And we now very fortunate to have a lot of clever hands at work. There are **14** individuals that volunteer their time to the department.

Four new volunteers began working during this fiscal year. These wonderful people donated **1,499 hours** in 2020-2021. This equates to an additional full-time employee for 40 weeks of a year. These volunteers range in age from their twenties into their eighties. They come from both Washington and Sullivan counties. We now have four college-age volunteers who have expressed an interest in working the archive field and have come here to gain hands-on experience. So, maybe the department is also serving as an incubator for future professionals in the field, something for which we are very proud to do.

I want to name and thank each of these volunteers here for all they do for the archives: Carolyn Andrews, Mike Briggs, Sam Compton, Samantha Ellison, Georgia Greer, Janette Guinn, Shirley Hinds, Margaret Hougland, Betty Jane Hylton, Nina Langley, Kim Livaditis, Terry Millhorn, Anya Poirier, and Justin Graham.

Public Records Commission

Due to the pandemic, the Washington County Public Records Commission, which normally meets at least twice per year, did not meet during 2020-2021. The following are members of the commission: Commissioner Mike Ford, Chairman; County Historian John Kiener, Vice-Chairman; County Archivist Ned Irwin, Secretary; Register of Deeds Teresa Bowman; Gene Hurdt; Dr. William Kennedy; Chancellor John Rambo; and County Clerk Kathy Storey.

Friends of the Archives



County Archivist Ned Irwin (March 23rd, 2021) sits with paintings (“Winter” and “Fall”) by Jonesborough artist Peggy Root commissioned by the Friends of the Washington County Archives.

The Friends continued their strong support of the archives. This included the purchase of eight books (\$352.95) for the Book Collection, as well as paying the annual subscriptions for the cost of the server for the department’s website (\$108.41) and paying for access to Newspapers.com (\$119.80). Most importantly, the FOA made the final payment of \$6,000 for the set of paintings by artist Peggy Root now on permanent display in the Reading Room. All total, the FOA contributed **\$6,581.16** in monies to support the archives.

On November 12th, 2020, the FOA received a \$500 donation for archives from the Watauga Association of Genealogists. These funds were used to purchase nine Washington County-related Tennessee State Supreme Court case files from the Tennessee State Library and Archives at a cost of \$479.50.

On December 11th, 2020, the FOA received a \$100 donation from Peggy Dougherty, Santa Ana, California. Peggy has been a long-time supporter of the archives. She was actually able to make a researcher visit in June 2021.

The Year Ahead

- We intend to conduct a major new records inventory of county offices during the year. This project was planned for last year and then was delayed by the pandemic. When completed, this survey will help determine future records storage needs. Even with the rise of electronic records, paper records continue to grow, and space is at a premium.