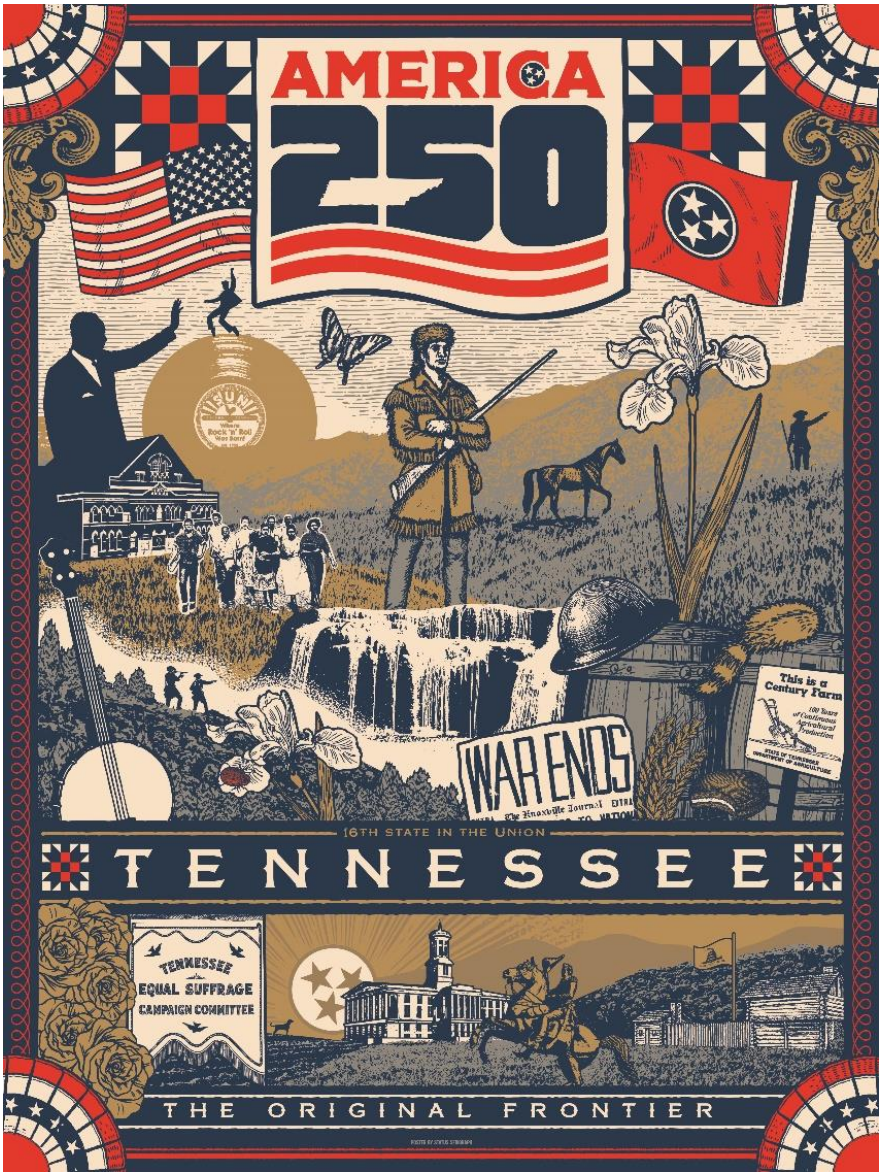
WASHINGTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES

FOURTEENETH ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026



Submitted by
Donna Cox Briggs, County Archivist and Records Manager
July 2026

WASHINGTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES

ANNUAL REPORT, 2025-2026

BY THE NUMBERS

The following is the county archive year (July 1st, 2025 ~ June 30th, 2026) by the numbers:

- 334,580 = dollars appropriated in the department budget (including chiller repairs)
- 261,545.40 = revenue dollars raised by the archive filing fee
- 2,257 = total number of followers to the Facebook Friends of the Archives' page
- 1342.5 = number of hours contributed by others to the archives.
- 597 = number of marriage license reference inquiries
- 577 = number of walk-in visitors to the Archives
- 121 = number of people attending public talks by Archives staff
- 79 = number of books donated to the Archives' library
- 69 = number of posts to the Facebook Friends of the Archives' page
- 18 = number of states and District of Columbia from which reference inquiries were received: Tennessee, Minnesota, Florida, Utah, California, Virginia, Indiana, Arkansas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Colorado, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Oregon, Maryland, Washington, Missouri
- 3 = number of media items about the archives
- 9 = number of volunteers
- 4 = number of foreign countries from which research inquiries were received. (Germany, England, Philippines, Scotland)

WEBSITE STATISTICS

We have researchers from all over the world that follow our website and use our website. Of course, the United States has the highest number of visitors with 103,177. Second is China with 346 visits. The Friends of the Washington County Archives pay for the platform to host the webpage, and this is of no cost to the county.

- 104,800 = number of views on our website, which is up by 45% from last year
- 11,500 = unique visitors to our website
- The most popular post made was on February 26, 2026, seen by 12,345 concerning "Bricker's Republic." (see Addendum A, page 20)

INTRODUCTION

The County Archivist and staff had two main focuses during the 2025-2026 fiscal year. The first was the celebration of America's 250th birthday. The second was to address the cooling system problems that have plagued us for some time. Both subjects will be addressed in this report.

In reading back through the annual reports of years past, I noted that Ned Irwin, former County Archivist had made the statement, "[The archives] is becoming what it was intended to be, a preservation facility for the county's historic records and a lure for heritage tourism." For the past eight years, we only thought we were busy. In the last year, we have seen a huge increase in traffic, both walk-in researchers, telephone calls, and email research requests.

During the 2025-2026 fiscal year, we had several researchers who have taken their vacations to come spend time in our archives! One such researcher came from England, and this is the third trip he has made here. Another vacationer came from Florida. Both spent multiple days here in the archives. There is a couple from Clinton, Tennessee who drive here at least two days a month and research our records for a book that he is writing about the Bean family. This increase in traffic has made the past fiscal year very rewarding for us.

The large display cases in the courthouse are now filled with items and information on places and things that are unique to our county. Archives staff, Britney Helton and Sam Ellison, took on this project at the mayor's request and spent several weeks gathering items for inclusion. Featured are David Crockett Birthplace, Gray Fossil Site, the Appalachian District Fair, ETSU, John Sevier, George Washington, the State of Franklin, Mountain Dew, and Dr. Enuf.



The two large display cabinets inside the courthouse are now filled with items that show the people and places that make Washington County unique.

America's 250th

The image on the front of this year's annual report reflects what the Archives' focus was for the past year, and we plan to continue this theme through the end of December 2026. Several projects were taken on by the archives in celebration of America's 250th birthday.

A project was announced by a newly created group called, "Washingtons Unite." This group was made up of counties throughout the United States that were named in honor of George Washington. Although we were certain that we surely were the first county to bear our first President's name, we found out that we were the third county, just behind Maryland and Virginia, by a matter of months. We were, however, the first locality named for George Washington, when we were called the Washington District.

Soon after the Revolutionary War broke out in April of 1775, the members of the "Watauga Association" organized themselves to become the "Washington District." In the Spring of 1776, the association sent a petition to Virginia, asking that they annex the district. Virginia refused, and a petition was then sent asking the same of North Carolina. North Carolina granted the request, and it was then given the name of "Washington County, North Carolina."

The group, Washingtons Unite hoped to bring together all counties and make a quilt for the celebration of America 250. Each participating county would create a quilt square which would be sent to Arkansas for assembly. After the completion of the quilt, each county will receive the quilt to be held in their county for a few days. Washington County received the quilt on May 21st, and it was displayed in the historic courthouse until June 10. The next stop was Washington County, Idaho.



Linda Crouch McCready, owner of Tennessee Quilts | in Jonesborough, designed and pieced the square for Washington County, Tennessee.



The completed square is ready to be sent to Arkansas for inclusion in the quilt.



Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy, presented a proclamation at the County Commission meeting on May 18th, honoring McCready for her contribution.



The completed quilt was placed in the courthouse on Wednesday, May 27th, where it remained through June 10th.

A description of each square submitted was sent with the quilt along its journey. This was our description:

"*Washington County, Tennessee is nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and our roots run deep. In 1776 this area was known as the "Washington District" of North Carolina. In 1777, it became known as Washington County, North Carolina. The settlers here took it upon themselves to organize the State of Franklin in 1784, which lasted only four years, before going back as part of North Carolina. Soon after, in 1790, North Carolina gave authority and protection of this area to the Federal Government, making it the "Territory South of the Ohio River," and it stretched all the way to the Mississippi River. Tennessee was recognized as the 16th state on June 1, 1796.*

Our quilt square features our historic courthouse, built in 1913, in Jonesborough.

We have chosen the Martha Washington Star quilt pattern for our square. This pattern has its roots in American quilting history, named after Martha Dandridge Custis Washington. The pattern gained popularity during the 19th century, and it has endured through the years.

Our square was designed and completed by a local quilter, Linda Crouch McCreadie, owner of Tennessee Quilts in Jonesborough, TN."

Other projects for America's 250th celebration include expanding the Early Landowners of Northeast Tennessee to include some of the lesser-known patriots who fought in the Revolutionary War. One new profile was posted each month and displayed on a modern map where the patriot's land was located. Gordon Edwards provides the deed work and map images for the project, and Donna Briggs provides the biographical profile of each patriot, as well as any documents that are relevant to the patriot.

Each month, Deputy Archivist Britney Helton posted on the website and Facebook a transcription and image of a document in our collection that was written or signed in 1776. Archives Assistant, Sam Ellison has posted several articles pertaining to historical events relevant to our county.

BUILDING MANAGEMENT

The cooling system was addressed during this past fiscal year. In late July 2025, our building again had problems with the cooling system. Ricky Poore, County Maintenance, determined that we were low on freon—the second time within the season. He refilled the coolant, but several of the thermostats would not reset to cooling, causing the building to still be too warm. After working on it for several days, he was able to get enough of the units to work well enough to keep us cool, until it stopped blowing cool air again.

August 2025 was a hot month for us here in the Archives. The Mayor and I discussed options, and he tasked County Maintenance with finding where the leak was in the system. Ricky Poore and Dwayne Sparks visited the archives almost daily and spent time searching for the problem. Poore found that the leak was in the barrel, and the mayor asked him to solicit quotes from three HVAC companies to replace the system, or to simply replace the damaged section. The cost to replace the barrel only was over $20,000, and the decision was made to replace the whole system.

Cook's Heating and Cooling placed a bid of $50,000 and stated they would begin when it was weather-fit. On February 18, 2026, Cook's crew came to our building, taking measurements and preparing the old unit for removal.

On March 9, two contractors from Cook's came in and began removal of the old chiller System, located on the roof.



The unit was lifted off the roof on Tuesday, March 10. By end of day on Friday, March 13, the unit replacement was completed.

Work continued off and on through March, and into April with Cook's completing the installation project in mid-April. Cooks installed several "safety stops" to ensure that the unit would shut down in case of a malfunction. When Cooks attempted to start the unit, it was found that although the water pump on the first floor had sufficient pressure, it was not getting enough pressure to the 2nd floor unit.

On 23 April 2026, it was found that the "impaler" inside the pump was not working properly. Cooks Heating and Cooling was asked to submit an additional estimate for this repair/replacement. It was later determined by a factory representative that the main source of the decreased flow was the rusty pipes which added sediment inside the system. The representative suggested that all rusted piping, fittings, and nozzles be replaced. The mayor suggested that we also get a quote from Cooks to replace the pump, as well. A quote of $17,526 came in to replace all rusted components and the pump.

On May 11, the initial invoice of $49,500 was paid to Cooks. It was decided that we would sign the agreement to have them replace the pump, and all rusty pipes, at an additional cost of $17,526.

At the end of this fiscal year, we can cool the building, though not at peak efficiency, and we expect Cook's Heating and Cooling to finish the second phase of the repair in the next fiscal year.

* * *

In August 2025, Dwayne Sparks, County Maintenance, washed our large window in the lobby, and we discovered that the large, street level window had never been caulked! Imagine our surprise when Dwayne aimed at the lower window, and water began to come in. This building had been completely renovated prior to 2016, and the large pane had never been sealed. On September 23, 2025, Dwayne came back and put caulking around the glass.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The budget for the year was $334,580.00 compared to $284,835.00 for the previous year. The 2025-2026 budget was adjusted to include a transfer of $70,000 to replace the chiller unit on the roof, and replace parts related to the system on the first floor.

Archive filing fee revenue income for 2025-2026 was $261,545.40, down from $266,323.42 in the previous year.

The committee voted to allot $70,000 from the Archives' Reserve fund to replace the chiller system at the County Commission monthly budget meeting in September.

Archive reserve fund at the end of June 30th, 2026, was $87,775.64.

COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

In early May of 2025, we began the task of shifting records so that all items in each record group were together. This required that we shift almost every volume and box in the building.

When records began coming into our building in 2016, we had only an idea of the amount that would be coming here. It was impossible to gauge the number of shelves needed for each record group, so we put the most-used records on the first floor, and less likely-used records upstairs. This system has worked well for the past nine years, but it was time to make a change.

The archive has many types of records that are sealed, and closed to the public, such as insanity records, adoptions, "crippled children's records," and a few others. These records have been sorted, re-boxed, processed, and moved to the vault on the first floor for security. This vault is always locked.

COUNTY RECORDS

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

ADDITIONS TO COUNTY RECORDS

Beginning in July 2025, we transferred more Chancery Court case files from the annex to our building for processing. The decision was made to bring the files here in our building up through 1940, but to also complete the processing through 1959, but return the 1950s back to the annex for storage. A guide will be prepared so that we know the records through 1959.

In the spring of 2025, the Circuit Court began moving more records into the Archives Annex, which prompted our staff to clean out and remove boxes from the last room available on the third floor. The extra room was given to Circuit Court. This office creates a large number of records, and they now have all available space on the third floor of the Annex. We have very little available space in the Annex.

In May of 2025, we began a project of getting the records better sorted on the shelves in the archives building, beginning upstairs. We earnestly began looking at records that were housed in the jail to see if there were any records there that should be brought to our building. There were seventy-seven boxes of Law Court records that we determined should be added next. A quick check of these records shows that they began in the early 1900s and will have to be worked into the existing, processed records. Volunteers will begin processing these records when they have completed processing the Chancery Court case files through 1959.

RECOVERY OF COUNTY RECORDS

On September 5, 2025, Gene Hurdt returned a county document that was found in the Washington County Library's family files. The item was a petition to the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions to emancipate Rhoda from the estate of William Russell. Russell's will provided for her emancipation once she reached the age of "twenty eight or twenty nine years from the month of September previous..." Rhoda had arrived at that age, and the petition was dated 1834.

In January 2026, we found that in the 1930s, workers unearthed the timber foundation of the first courthouse in Jonesborough. Paul Fink, then county historian, was notified, and he was given the timber. He kept it in his possession for a while, before donating it to the East Tennessee Historical Society in Knoxville. The timber eventually made its way to the McClung Collection, also in Knoxville. A letter was sent to McClung via certified mail, signed by Mayor Joe Grandy and Donna Briggs, County Archivist, requesting that McClung return the artifact to Washington County. As of the end of the fiscal year, we have not yet received a reply.



This photograph shows the wood splice from the timber that was removed from the courthouse foundation.

1st card: "A part of Tennessee's First Courthouse 1778. Paul M. Fink to East Tennessee Historical Society. May 6, 1932."
2nd card: "A piece of the foundation timbers of Tennessee's first courthouse at Jonesboro. Built in 1778. Franklin (State) organized in 1784. Gift of Mr. Paul M. Fink."

PROCESSING PROJECTS

Volunteers began processing Chancery Court case files in 2023, and this work is on-going. Our office will have these court records in our archives from the court's beginning in 1836 through 1959. Court cases after that date are still available but not yet processed. These records will be processed and typed into a guide for inclusion on our website. Currently, the volunteers are working to complete the project through the 1950s. This project will be completed in the early months of the next fiscal year.

A volunteer from California continues to transcribe the county's tax lists, and these have been very beneficial to both researchers, and to our staff. The transcriptions are uploaded to our website for researchers.

SCANNING PROJECTS

One of the most common questions we receive is, "Are you scanning everything to put on the internet?" Scanning has always been a priority, but our focus had to be on processing records first. We are now nearing the completion of processing and are considering how to prioritize records for scanning. Many records dated prior to 1800 have been scanned, including wills, marriages and all tax lists.

On April 23, 2026, we set up a scanning station, and two volunteers began scanning records from two early courts. The records are being scanned at a high resolution, and the scanner is very slow. The Archives needs a book scanner, and a newer model flatbed scanner. A new computer networked to the shared drive will be needed as well.

ARTIFACT COLLECTION

The Archive is home to a small number of artifacts that have been donated since 2012. Many of these items were donated by county officials and employees through the years and were items of historical value.

Upon seeing our Presidents Day display in the lobby, a patron noticed that we had a few campaign buttons. He and his wife returned two weeks later with a donation of 28 historical campaign buttons that he had collected through the years.

BOOK COLLECTION

Seventy-nine new titles were added to our book collection in the past year. These books are available to staff, volunteers, and patrons for use here in the archives. The John Sevier/Sarah Hawkins Sevier Chapter of the DAR donated sixty-five books in May from the estate of one of their members.

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

One new manuscript collection was added during the past year:

- Accession 33: Washington County Historical Association Collection.

This collection was donated to the Washington County Archives by Gene Hurdt, former member of the association, on February 11, 2025. Some items in this collection were from Betty Neeley and Ann Shaw, early members. The collection includes meeting minutes, plans for events

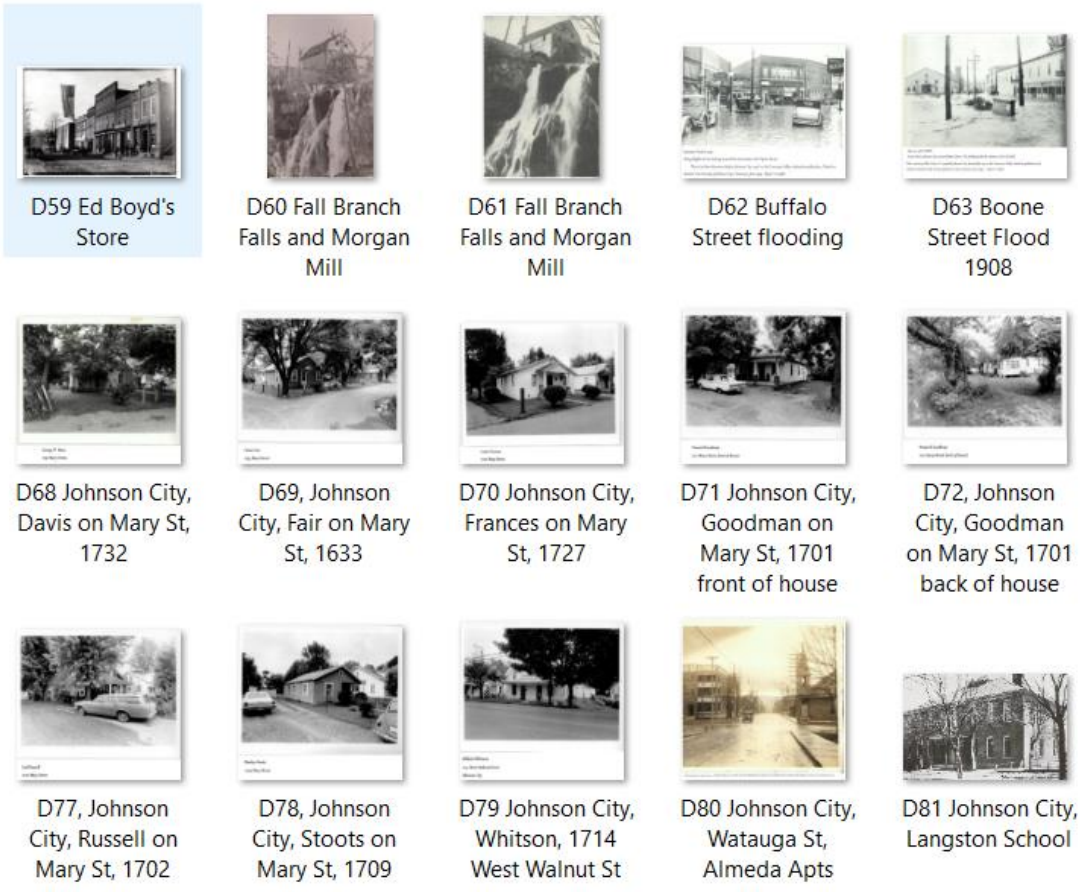
sponsored by the association, membership lists, and items donated to the organization through the years.

The Washington County Historical Association was started on October 7, 1895, with the original name being Washington County Historical Society. The focus of the group was the "collection and preservation of local history." The first president was Judge S. J. Kirkpatrick. The organization eventually died out, but efforts to revive it were taken up in 1987. With renewed interest, the name was then changed to the Washington County Historical Association. The association officially dissolved again in 2017 due to declining membership.

PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

As processing continues, the volunteers find many photographs that have been kept with the court cases as evidence. Many of these photographs are of historical interest, including locations of farms, roads, and homes. The staff scans these photographs into our digital collection, and we now have over 500 historical photographs available to the public.

County Archivist Donna Briggs has donated many digital photographs from her personal collection, taken over the past 25 years. Volunteer Betty Jane Hylton has shared many photographs from her collection as well.



A small section of images from our photo collection

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

In the fall of 2025, the staff began to look for ways to consolidate our archives space, and to free up more housing for records, both in our building and in the archives annex at the old jail. Noting that there were many items no longer needed, we began to move such items into the annex. Several old chairs and tables were removed, and many acid-free boxes were taken to the jail for temporary storage. As the volunteers are emptying many large boxes in processing, these are sent back to the annex for both the Clerk and Master's office and the Circuit Court Clerk's office to recycle and transport their files.

Chancery Court added approximately 150 banker boxes to the Archives Annex storage space in May 2026. Circuit Court began moving records into the last empty room on the third floor of the annex. At the end of the fiscal year, this room is approximately one-third full.

REFERENCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE

- Tuesday, July 16th, 2025 - County Archivist Briggs spoke to Washington County 101 class in the evening. There were twenty-four attendees, plus county officials. After the presentation, Paul Harris from the Visitor's Center gave a short tour of some of the more notable sites in Jonesborough.

- Tuesday, August 5, 2025 - County Archivist Briggs spoke to the Watauga Association of Genealogists with 13 in attendance.

- The Jonesborough Genealogical Society held their final *Heritage Fair* in downtown Jonesborough on Saturday, September 6, 2025. The Archives opened their doors to the public for several hours that day and greeted 16 guests. The theme for this year was "The Road to the Revolution," and we placed several of our earliest documents, those prior to the Revolutionary War, on display.

- We also presented a program featuring a reading of Margaret Lee's Petition for freedom. Dated 1795, the petition was found in our Superior Court case files. In this petition, Margaret gave a detailed account of her abduction from the port of Boston in 1774, and her descent into the slave trade through the next twenty-one years. Margaret bore two children during that time, Maria and Adam, and petitioned the court for their freedom, as well.



On the right, Jasmine Henderson, dressed in period attire, read the petition of Margaret Lee to a group gathered outside of the International Storytelling Center.

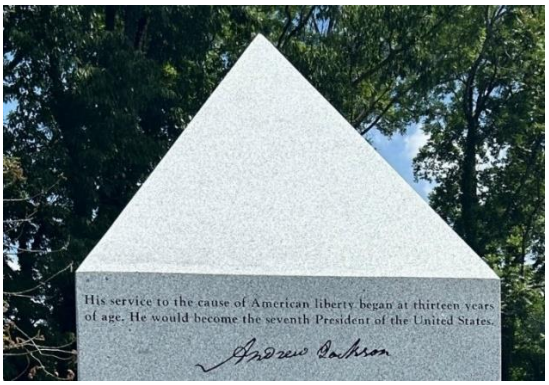
- The Chamber Leadership County Services Day was held on Thursday, February 19, 2026, with 25 in attendance. Archivist Donna Briggs welcomed the group and spoke to them about the history of Washington County, and the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities of the archives staff.

- On Saturday, March 7th, Archivist Donna Briggs welcomed the Jonesborough Schubert Club to the archives for their monthly meeting and spoke to them about the return of Deed Book A, and the ways it is being used as a resource for both staff projects, volunteers, and patrons. There were 26 in attendance.

- In April 2026, a patron requested if we could provide her with a good, legible signature of Andrew Jackson. The Tennessee State Children of the American Revolution (TSCAR) were planning a marker commemorating the children from Tennessee, aged 15 and under who served in the Revolutionary War. Our office was honored to know that the signature we supplied was used on the marker! Andrew Jackson was 13 when he joined the war effort, and the only child soldier to become president. County Archivist Donna Briggs attended the ceremony. The monument stands in the Mack and Nancy Cooke Family Park in Elizabethton, Tennessee. Ivan Daniels, Honorary State President for the Tennessee Society of Children of the American Revolution and his family provided the research for this special project.



George Washington, portrayed by Daniel Shippey, stands by the statue honoring the known children who served in the war effort.



Inscription reads, "His service to the cause of American liberty began at thirteen years of age. He would become the seventh President of the United States."

- May 13, 2026, Archivist Briggs spoke at the East Tennessee Historical Society as a part of their "Bag Lunch Lectures." There were 17 in attendance.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

One of the highlights of the spring, was a visit to our Archives by a researcher from London, England. Robert Wells descends from the Bacon family who settled here in Washington County, while we were still a part of North Carolina. This is the third trip Mr. Wells has made to research county records that mention his family names. He had collaborated with Henry Bacon from Florida who also descends from Isaac Bacon.

Mr. Wells sent a list in advance of the records that he wanted to photograph. The staff pulled those records and set up an "assembly line." One person pulled the folder from the box, opened the folder, handed it to the next person, who placed one document at a time under the photo light, and Mr. Wells photographed it. He then gave the document back to Sam, who kept the records in order, and gave the folder back to Britney, who refiled it back into the box.

It was estimated that he photographed over a thousand documents during the two days he was here.



With the help of Gordon Edwards, and Mr. Wells, we profiled his ancestor, Isaac Bacon, as one of our *Early Landowners*. We found that Boones Creek Road ran through a portion of his land. Mr. Wells came for his third visit on April 9th and April 10th, and Henry Bacon met him here in Jonesborough. On Thursday, April 9, Gordon Edwards and Donna Briggs took Mr. Bacon, Mr. Wells, Betty Jane Hylton, and James Dykes (all Bacon descendants) to see the property. Also on this tour was the Archives' staff, Britney Helton, Sam Ellison, and Johnson City Press Chronicle reporter, Emma Caskill, who contributed a story to the newspaper.



The group before leaving for the tour: L – R: Betty Jane Hylton, Robert Wells, Henry Bacon (standing), Gordon Edwards, Britney Helton, Sam Ellison, James Dykes and Donna Briggs (not shown: Emma Caskill)



Robert Wells for the first time touches the dirt that his ancestor, Isaac Bacon once farmed.

TENNESSEE STATEHOOD CELEBRATION

On June 5th, about 100 local residents and community leaders gathered in Jonesborough to celebrate Tennessee Statehood Day, which officially falls on June 1st, honoring the rich heritage of Tennessee's oldest town. The commemorative event was made possible through a collaboration between the Washington County Mayor's Office, the Town of Jonesborough, the Heritage Alliance, and the Washington County Archives. Following an introduction by Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy, the ceremony opened with an invocation by Reverend Jeremy Dykes and the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Rob Richmond of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR).

The program featured three guest speakers who shared unique insights into the region's deep historical legacy on the courthouse steps. Anne Mason, local historian, Judge John Kiener, County historian, and Paul Harris from the Visitor's Center each spoke about the county's history and emphasized the community's deep-rooted connection to the birth of the Volunteer State.

After the outdoor presentations concluded, attendees were invited inside the courthouse for a reception and viewing the "Washingtons Unite" quilt to honor George Washington, and America's 250th birthday.







LOBBY DISPLAY CABINET



In July 2025, Sam Ellison, Archives assistant made a lobby display of the David Crockett Birthplace, showing the damage from Hurricane Helene in September 2024.



This display went up at the end of January and is in celebration of Presidents' Day. Sam Ellison, Archives assistant, loaned buttons and the book, *New Purpose, New Progress* from her collection. Other items were taken from our Archives artifacts collections.



This America 250 display features a Bicentennial plate, from the Artifacts Collection, presidential cards, and scanned documents.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Our website is one of the most valuable tools available to researchers and staff alike. It provides patrons with a listing of documents and volumes held by our office. Through historical photographs, scans of documents, and stories, our website tells the history of the county.



- The website front page is where "newsworthy" events and recent additions to the site are highlighted.
- Collection Guides. This is where you will find detailed lists that show the files available to researchers.
- Digital Collections. Here you may view the scanned images of the earliest wills, tax lists, and marriages.
- County History. A collection of links concerning the history of the county, the courthouses of the county, etc.
- Helpful Links. Many links to websites of interest to those researching or interested in northeast Tennessee.
- Photo Gallery. Images of everything Washington County. There you will find local photographs, historical photographs, our postcard collection, and even photos of volunteers and staff.
- Plan Your Visit. Links to the County Archives rules and fees, brochures, local maps, lodging in the area, and other interesting places in the area.
- Researchers' Tool Kit. Helpful guides and links to assist researchers.
- Hidden Voices. Often a document will lead us to research an individual, a family, or an event. Staff members compile many such research projects into "Hidden Voices."
- *Early Landowners of Northeast Tennessee*. This project page shows the location of land of several of the area's earliest landowners and gives a short biographical sketch of the person, and images of any archival documents that may relate to them.
- America 250. Links to each article posted for America's 250th anniversary.

Last year, our website was viewed 36,215 times by 4771 individuals. This year, we have increased to 430,500 views, an increase of 80% and by 52,700 visitors, which is an increase of 110%. These views came from 91 different countries including the United States.

The Friends of the Washington County Archives has a social media presence on Facebook, and we use the platform to make announcements, and highlight unusual or interesting documents found in our collection. It has been active since 2017 and has 2258 persons who "follow" our group. Only admin (Archives staff and Betty Jane Hylton) may make posts to the page, which keeps it clean and free of spam posts, but users may comment on posts that are made.

In the past fiscal year, we made 69 posts to the page. The most popular post, "Bricker's Republic" had 12,345 views, and told the story of a district in Washington County that "seceded from the county," after the 1861 vote to secede from the Union. (This complete article has been included; see addendum A, page 20)

The next most popular post was the unveiling of the Tennessee Children of the Revolution marker in Elizabethton. It received 12,710 views. Also of note, photos from the 1950s of an area of Johnson City received 10,142 views. The photos showed the old Pepsi Cola plant, West Side Grocery, and Miller & Keezel Paint and Body Shop. These photographs were found in a Chancery Court case file as evidence. They were scanned and included in our digital photograph collection. The original photographs were returned to the case file.



Miller & Keezel Paint and Body Shop



Pepsi Cola plant



West Side Grocery

STAFFING AND VOLUNTEERS

The Archives is staffed by three employees, Donna Briggs, Britney Helton and Sam Ellison. There were eleven active volunteers recording time monthly. A Christmas luncheon hosted by County Archivist Briggs was held at the Black Olive restaurant in Jonesborough. Seven volunteers, three staff members and Ned Irwin, former County Archivist, attended.

At year's end, we had ten active volunteers.



Christmas luncheon, December 5, 2024.
L-R: Terry Millhorn, Jeff Jernigan, Ned Irwin, Rebecca "Boo" Moss, Janette Guinn, Shirley Hinds, Maria Corwin, Betty Jane Hylton, Britney Helton, Sam Ellison, and Donna Briggs

PUBLIC RECORDS COMMISSION

The Public Records Commission held their first meeting of the fiscal year on Thursday, August 7, 2025. At the meeting, County Archivist Donna Briggs provided each attendee with a copy of the Annual Report. There were six members, and three guests in attendance.

Members of the Washington County Public Records Commission are Commissioner Lewis Wexler (Chairman), Register of Deeds Teresa Bowman, Gene Hurdt, County Archivist Ned Irwin (Secretary), Judge John Kiener (Vice-Chairman), Dr. William Kennedy, Chancellor John Rambo, and County Clerk Cheryl Storey.

A copy of the Annual Report, and the Public Records Commission meeting minutes were included in the packet for the County Commissioner's meeting on August 25, 2025. Archivist Briggs attended the meeting and answered questions by the commissioners.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Looking ahead to the new year, the staff plans to prioritize scanning efforts. Our county records date back into the Watauga Settlement era, and bear dates in the 1770s. As the documents are scanned, the staff will begin uploading the images to our website. This addition of files will require another shift in records in the Archives building.

As stewards of the county's history, we promise to protect and preserve Washington County's records—the oldest county records in our state.

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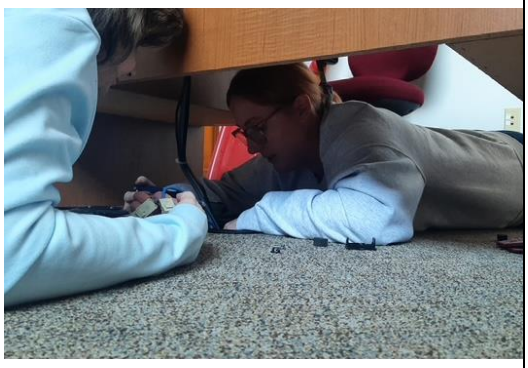
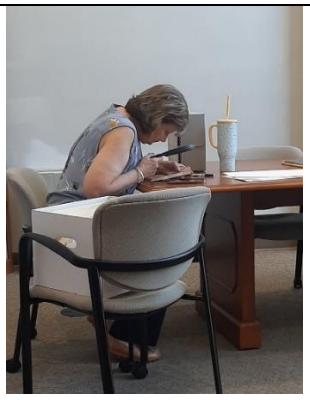
2025 – 2026 in Pictures







Addendum A

Bricker's Republic

By Donna Cox Briggs,
Washington County, Tennessee Archivist

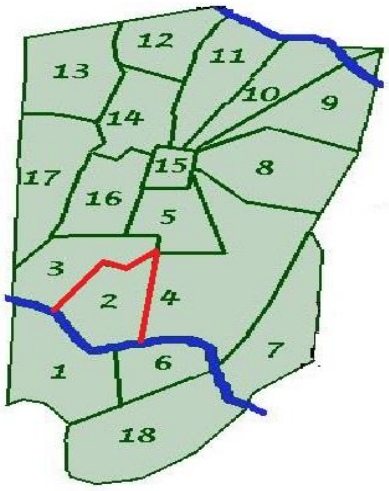
In all my genealogical and historical diggings, I had never heard of "Bricker's Republic." A friend of the Archives mentioned that he had found a story about it and was thrilled that someone had researched it. I had no clue what he was talking about, so we set about searching for it, and we found a most unusual story!

The story begins early in the Civil War, and tensions were high in Tennessee. Many wished to secede from the Union, and join the Confederacy, but many others wished to remain with the Union. The people of East Tennessee favored staying within the Union, but a vote was taken and the state officially voted to leave the Union on June 8, 1861. Washington County voted to remain in the Union by a vote of 1,475 to 1,001. The list below shows the tally of votes by each district:

District 1	against separation: 93 for separation: 73	District 10	against separation: 33 for separation: 56
District 2	against separation: 96 for separation: 17	District 11	against separation: 21 for separation: 100
District 3	against separation: 149 for separation: 17	District 12	against separation: 80 for separation: 60
District 4	against separation: 123 for separation: 12	District 13	against separation: 42 for separation: 90
District 5	against separation: 50 for separation: 50	District 14	against separation: 117 for separation: 43
District 6	against separation: 44 for separation: 23	District 15	against separation: 134 for separation: 123
District 7	against separation: 98 for separation: 14	District 16	against separation: 20 for separation: 63
District 8	against separation: 70 for separation: 50	District 17	against separation: 89 for separation: 77
District 9	against separation: 130 for separation: 47	District 18	against separation: 86 for separation: 86

"against separation" means that they wished to NOT leave the union; "for separation" means that they wished to secede.

This map is an 1875 map of the Civil Districts of Washington County, and it gives the names by which they were commonly called. Also of note is that the map was made before District 18 (Flag Pond) was cut off as a part of Unicoi County. District 2 is marked in red in the map to show the general location within the county.



District 1 Mauks
District 2 Brickers
District 3 McAlisters
District 4 Williams
District 5 Taylors
District 6 Embreeville
District 7 Greasy Cove
District 8 Fines
District 9 Brush Creek
District 10 Knob Creek
District 11 Boones Creek
District 12 Buffalo Ridge
District 13 Hoggards
District 14 Swinneys
District 15 Jonesborough
District 16 Leesburg
District 17 Campbells
District 18 Flag Pond

The good people of District 2 had a problem with the state voting to secede, and they took matters into their own hands. If you will notice above, District 2 voted 96 to 17 against seceding from the Union. The list below shows the people who voted in that election. No, we don't know how each person voted, only that they voted in that election.

Edward West, Sr.	Ed. H. West	Elbert Bell	I. C. H. Smith	Alexander Mathes
Charles P. Davidson	T. W. McKee	G. F. Dobson	W. D. Snapp	Jonathan H. Colim
David Brown	John Bricker	R. M. Colum	Jessie Spitzer	Thos. Gillespie
Calvin Woodruff	John Andes	Abraham Ball	David Foster	James Bottles
James M. Tucker	J. P. Paregoy	J. W. Earnest	John B. McLin	James DeVault
Samuel Bolton	R. Rumels	Jeremiah Downey	N. D. Brown	Samuel McCracken
Wm Smith	D. Devault	S. J. Henley	Wm Tyler	G. O. Ermin
Wm Brown	John Bottles	David Arrington	James Wadkins	Joshua Henley
J. H. Smith	Samuel Cox	James Pattin	John H. Greenway	James Henley
Wm Right	Jessie Philips	Willaims Bottles	Wm R. Greenway	Samuel Warden
Wm M. Mitchell	Jackson Ingle	R. A. Andes	Eldridge Greenway	B. Malonee
B. F. Hawford	D. Rodgers	Hiram Bayless	David Click	James Bayless
T. B. Bayless	G. W. Bell	David Ellis	John Ingle	D. K. Brobeck
Wm Henly	John West	Dr. James Patton	Benjamin Sauls	Wm C. Slemons
R. McCracken	Abram Snapp	T. P. Wilson	I. H. Morgan	David Title
Romanus Bolton	J. Henson	John McCracken	Reuben Garber	James Tittle

H. H. Hunter	J. M. Brown	R. M. McKee	James Wright	Anderson Title
Joel Williams	H. Presnell	Wm McKee	Elijah Hylton	B. Bashor
D. W. Bayless	Marion Reser	John Presnell	Samuel West	John Scroggs
G. W. Sprinkle	David R. West	Wm Ingle	Jacob Mauk	Jacob Kinney
E. M. P. Moore	S. W. Calwell	Wm W. Bovell	James McCracken	Wm Black
Montgomery Hunter	F. G. Slemons	John Burton	Wm Gilleyland	Isaac Henley
Henry Hunter Ruble, Esq.				

At least ninety-seven men of that county were very dissatisfied with secession and decided that something should be done, and they came up with a very unusual idea. They would secede from the county! They reasoned that if a state could secede from the Union, then a county should be able to secede from the state, and a district should be able to secede from the county. Jacob Hill was elected president, he chose a cabinet, they wrote a declaration of independence AND drew up a constitution. A congress was elected, and the area was then known as Bricker's Republic. Let me tell you, those people meant business!

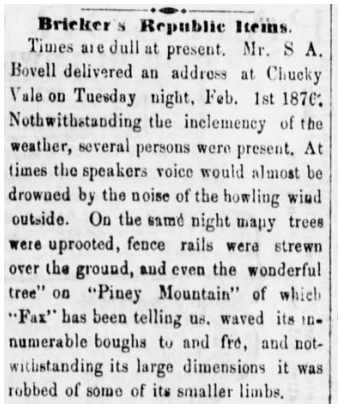
On Friday, October 13, 1865, in the local newspaper, *The Union Flag*, a letter was printed under the heading, "Foreign Correspondence," and was sent from the "Capital of Bricker's Republic." This letter, sent by "one of the Cabinet," reflected their displeasure of being a part of the state that had just seceded from the Union.

"After enduring with the most catholic forbearance, "a long train of abuses and injuries," systematically practiced upon us-our dearest rights ruthlessly trampled down by tyrannic legislation, taking the action of Tennessee, in her complicated difficulty with the United States Government, as our precedent, we relieved ourselves of this baneful state of affairs in founding a government of Justice and impartiality, to sectional interests. In thus proceeding, we found we had certain "*reserved rights*," of which we had hitherto been ignorant, which perfectly justified our course…"

"…the purpose of our government may be stated as two fold; 1st, to defend, maintain, and rigidly enforce those laws which secure to every man, tranquil and undisturbed enjoyment of his inalienable rights and immunities; 2nd, to demonstrate the problem from time immemorial in process of solution, of every man's capacity to govern himself."

The letter also stated that, "Our President, His Excellency, Jacob Hill, is now at Washinton, negotiating with this [re-constructing with the US government] in view." The writer of the letter also promised to write to the newspaper again, and give an update on what happened with their president in Washington, D. C. No update was ever printed in the newspaper. In our attempt to find out more about the government, a search was made of Newspapers.com to see if mention was made of the republic anywhere else in the United States. It was not. I suspect the president, Jacob Hill, did not get far with his negotiations with the federal government.

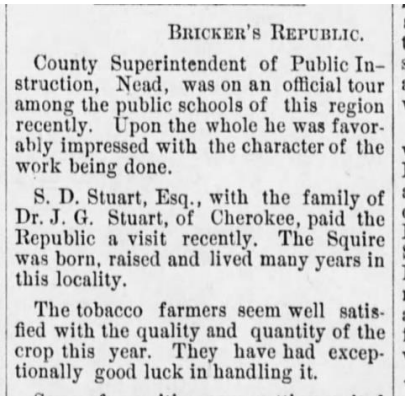
It is not clear how long the Bricker's Republic government lasted, but it appears that it was not long. The local newspapers continued calling the area "Brickers Republic" until December 1904. After that, there was no other mention found. The two newspaper clippings below are samples showing "Bricker's Republic."



Bricker's Republic Items.

Times are dull at present. Mr. S A. Bovell delivered an address at Chucky Vale on Tuesday night, Feb. 1st 1876. Nothwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, several persons were present. At times the speakers voice would almost be drowned by the noise of the howling wind outside. On the same night many trees were uprooted, fence rails were strewn over the ground, and even the wonderful tree" on "Piney Mountain" of which "Fax" has been telling us, waved its innumerable boughs to and fro, and notwithstanding its large dimensions it was robbed of some of its smaller limbs.

Herald and Tribune, February 10, 1876



BRICKER'S REPUBLIC.

County Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nead, was on an official tour among the public schools of this region recently. Upon the whole he was favorably impressed with the character of the work being done.

S. D. Stuart, Esq., with the family of Dr. J. G. Stuart, of Cherokee, paid the Republic a visit recently. The Squire was born, raised and lived many years in this locality.

The tobacco farmers seem well satisfied with the quality and quantity of the crop this year. They have had exceptionally good luck in handling it.

Herald and Tribune, December 1, 1887

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