

WATAUGA ASSOCIATION RECORDS ARE NOW DIGITAL

Probably the rarest records in the Washington County Archives are those created during the period of the Watauga Association. Only a handful have survived, and now these have been scanned and can be viewed as a digital collection at the following url: <https://wctnarchives.org/digital-collections/>.

The earliest European settlements in the Tennessee region established in the late 1760s and early 1770s were a great distant from any organized government. Feeling the need for some form of local government, settlers in 1772 drew up articles of governance by which to live under what became known as the Watauga Association. Historian and later United States President Theodore Roosevelt called these articles the first “ever adopted...by a community of American-born freemen.” No copy of these articles has been found. The association operated only a few years. In 1776, Watauga residents petitioned the North Carolina General Assembly to provide them with a more formal local government. That year North Carolina established the Washington District to govern its lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1777, the district became Washington County. The association had no courthouse or office for housing records. The few Watauga Association records that have been found in the Washington County Courthouse are now housed in the Washington County Archives.

For more on the Watauga Association, see John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* (Knoxville: Tenase Company, 1969 reprint); J.G.M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1999 reprint); and Samuel Cole Williams, *Dawn of Tennessee Valley and Tennessee History* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Watauga Press, 1937).