

CIRCUIT COURT CASE FILES OPEN FOR RESEARCH

Records of Circuit Court offer some of the most valuable (and most underused) sources for researchers. They were little used because they were largely unarranged and lacked any guide to aid the researcher. We are pleased to say this is now no longer true. Washington County Circuit Court case files have been processed from 1808 through 1870. Over **8,000** court cases are now available. An online guide provides a listing of these cases that is keyword searchable on the department's website. Click here: [Circuit Court Case Files - 1809 - 1870](#)

Circuit Court replaced the old Superior Court of Law and Equity in 1808 and still operates today. The court handles both civil and criminal cases. Until 1891, all cases were heard in Jonesborough. In 1891, a sub-division of the court was opened to hear civil cases in Johnson City, as well, taking some of the case load off the Jonesborough court. Known as the Johnson City Law Court, this court functioned until 2007, when, with the opening of the new Justice Center, all court activities were moved once again to Jonesborough.

Circuit Court records are particularly useful in helping provide a picture of a society/community at a given period of history. If you want to know what it was like to live in Washington County during and following the Civil War, for instance, you find many interesting cases. At different periods, different things were of interest. During the late 1810s and 1820s, the emancipation of slaves was much in the air. Citizenship papers also came through this court (both to become an American citizen and for a convicted felon to have citizenship rights restored.).

Among the types of cases found are those involving debt, divorce, damages, land disputes, assault and battery, tippling, lewdness and adultery, murder, robbery, larceny, forgery and transporting liquor among many other civil disputes and criminal actions. Among the types of documents found in the case files are bonds, correspondence, petitions, notices, bills, injunctions, complaints, subpoenas, depositions, exhibits, and writs.

Staff and volunteers continue to process the court's case files, and, as more is processed, updates will be made to the online guide.