

WASHINGTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES

EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020



Jonesborough artist Peggy Root's "Summer: Queen Anne's Lace Looking North Toward Leesburg" is now on permanent display in the archive's Reading Room.

Submitted by
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By the Numbers

The following is the county archive year (July 1st, 2019-June 30th, 2020) by the numbers:

- 2 = number of foreign countries from which research inquiries were received (Canada and New Zealand).
- 9 = number of archive volunteers.
- 15 = number of media items about the archives.
- 32 = number of states from which reference inquiries were received: Tennessee, Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming.
- 99 = number in attendance at public presentations given on the county archive.
- 341 = number of marriage licenses reference requests.
- 543 = number of volumes in Book Collection.
- 1,232 = number of reference inquiries handled.
- 1,658 = number of hours contributed by others to the archives.
- 2,884 = number of volumes of county records held.
- 5,554 = number of boxes of records housed in the archives.
- 6,920 = visitors to the department webpage.
- 7,004.74 = dollars contributed by the Friends of the Archives.
- 8,645 = linear feet of records held by department.
- 11,786 = number of historic county documents returned to archives.
- 68,365 = total views of department website.
- 140,642.13 = dollars expended on archive and annex building renovations.
- 235,018.36 = revenue dollars raised by the archive filing fee.
- 344,370 = dollars appropriated in the department budget.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Like everything else in the country, the department was rolling right along through much of the fiscal year. Then in the early spring, the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic struck and changed everything, including here in the archives.

In March 2020, county meetings, including the County Commission meeting, were cancelled. Beginning on Monday, March 23rd, 2020, the department was closed to the public and volunteers. The county courthouse also closed to the public this same day. During public closure, the department continued to provide reference service via telephone, email, and regular mail. The epidemic impacted the department in many ways. Volunteers had to stop working. Research inquiries decreased. Slave documents set to be returned from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were not sent when that campus closed.

County offices, including the archives, reopened to the public with regular hours on Monday, June 1st, 2020. But in between a lot happened (or didn't happen). We even developed a subpage on the department's website related to the pandemic:

IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has changed all our lives for the time being, as you see from these recent images of Jonesborough. The streets are largely empty. Stores are closed. People are staying in their homes. Yet, life does go on. Construction on the Jackson Theatre continues, as does restoration work on several historic homes in town. And nature still blooms! While our building is closed to public access, archives staff continues to work on county records and assist researchers with inquiries via telephone, email, and regular mail. Working together, we will, as we always have, get through this crisis, too. Take care and be safe.



Creeping Flox in the spring



Deserted streets



Work continues



Work on the Jackso...



Courthouse parking lot virtually empty



Financial Management

The department began the year with a \$344,370 budget, which included a supplement of \$110,000 transferred from the archive reserve fund to cover Archive Annex window enclosure project completed during the year. The department's normal operating budget is generally around \$240,000. The department's reserve fund was \$163,364.09 as the year began. Revenue collected on the archive filing fee for the year was \$235,018.36. After the Archive Annex expenses, the department's revenue reserve fund was \$54,597.36 as of June 30th, 2020.

The revenue collected this year compared to the previous year illustrates the financial impact on the county in general and the department in particular caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$235,018.36 collected was \$28,175.66 less than the \$263,194.02 generated during fiscal year 2018-2019. Undoubtedly, the effects of county offices being closed from late March until June 1st, 2020 impacted the ability of county offices to conduct business and collect the fees typically collected for the period. Normally, the department collects about \$20,000 per month in archive filing fees. This average was

approximated from July 1, 2019-mid-March 2020 at which point \$193,487.57 in fees had been collected (or \$21,489.61 for the first nine months of the fiscal year). From that point through May, only \$29,398.24 was collected (\$14,699.12 a month for April and May). This was about a 30% per month drop in revenue collected.

The department continues to pay on a county capital outlay note of \$530,000 that was used to finance the renovation of the archive building in 2015-2016. The annual payment is \$49,000. It is anticipated that the final payment of this 12-year bond will be in 2025. So, we are beyond the halfway point on that debt payment.

We continue our efforts to be good stewards of the monies we are asked to manage, and we believe we have done so again this year.

Building Management

Archive Annex

Several building improvement projects occurred during 2019-2020. The total cost of all these efforts was **\$140,642.13**. The most significant ones were at the Archive Annex, which continued renovation and enhancement work begun the previous fiscal year. In the summer of 2019, shelving was installed for housing records of the county attorney's office, the benefits/human resources office, and a storage cell containing Circuit Court Clerk records. The cost was \$5,117.13. In addition, a secure storage room was provided for housing human resources files.

In February-March 2020, insulated metal panel enclosures of exterior windows on the north side of Archive Annex were installed by Keller Glass of Johnson City, with Preston Construction Company, Johnson City, serving as general contractor. Some 50 windows were enclosed at a cost of \$119,000, including \$10,000 in architectural fees. This completes the renovation of that archive storage space begun in fiscal year 2018-2019.

Also, in February-March 2020, archival-grade shelving was installed by A-Z Office Resource of Columbia, Tenn., in Archive Annex Vaults D, G, and H. A total of 84 shelving units were installed at a cost of \$15,400. This work was finished just before the pandemic closed the building to the public. It completes shelving now in all Archive Annex record storage vaults. Following the installation, archive staff moved Juvenile Services records on to shelving in Vault H. A total of 267 boxes and 10 filing cabinets of records was moved. At the time of the move, jail work crews were not available due to the pandemic.

Archive Building

In July 2019, a new sump pump was installed in the basement at a cost of \$235.

On February 4th, 2020, an energy audit of both the archive building and the Archive Annex was conducted by BrightRidge staff. It was determined that the buildings were being effectively managed regarding energy usage.

On June 8th, 2020, Barnard Roofing of Johnson City performed stone coping repair on the archive building roof at a cost of \$890. This should resolve occasional leakage issues.

The Bookkeeping Department donated two filing cabinets to the archives.

Collection Management

County Records



Donna Briggs and Ned Irwin with all the records recovered in 2019 (11,786 documents!)

The department currently houses and is responsible for **8,885 linear feet** of records. If the records were spread out in a line, they would stretch the length of 29 football fields! This is a tremendous responsibility, which department staff take very seriously. In a continuing effort to preserve and protect any county records, wherever these are found, the department successfully recovered nearly **12,000** county documents (11,786 items to be exact) between May and August 2019 that at one time had left county custody. For more on the first year's recovery efforts, see the *2018-2019 Annual Report*. The total count of documents by repository was: 10,732 from McClung; 1,000 from Special Collections at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville; 24 from Appalachian State University at Boone,

North Carolina; 24 from an anonymous donor; four from Heritage Alliance; and two from the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University.

The biggest haul came on Monday, August 26th, 2019 when Donna Briggs and husband Mike retrieved the county records in the Paul Fink Collection at the McClung Historical Collection in Knoxville, Tenn. A total of 23 manuscript boxes and one half-box were returned.



McClung Manger Steve Cotham and Donna Briggs

The archives thanks all the repository custodians who graciously worked with us in returning the county records to their proper home. We also had the invaluable service of County Attorney Allyson Wilkinson, who was instrumental in helping us secure the return of the records. A special thanks goes to County Mayor Joe Grandy who supported this records recovery effort and maintained a sincere interest throughout the months-long process.



Ned Irwin, Donna Briggs, and Allyson Wilkinson examining recovered county documents, August 22, 2019.

Other County Records

In March 2020, Carolyn Andrews (an archive volunteer) donated a copy of the Wataugh Purchase book (Old Deed Book A) that she had made from a digital copy available to the public through the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Processing

A major processing project during the past year was incorporating the approximately 12,000 recovered county documents into their appropriate locations. The documents were primarily court-related and were filed in the following record groups: Circuit Court, County Clerk (County Court Judicial series records), Clerk and Master (Chancery Court), and Superior Court of Law and Equity. The documents covered a time span from the 1770s into the 1940s.

Archive staff and volunteers also focused on processing several major sets of county records during the year, all with a focus on the courts system: County Court judicial case files; Circuit Court case files; and Johnson City Law Court case files. County Court case files are processed to the 1870s, with an online guide to the files for 1778-1825. Circuit Court files are processed through 1925, with an online guide available for 1808-1873.

Book Collection

The department began the year with a collection of 475 volumes and ended the year with a total of **543** volumes, for an increase of 68 books. All books are either donations or are purchased on behalf of the department by the Friends of the Washington County Archives. This collection is an important secondary source for anyone doing archival research. We thank the following for making donations during the year: Donna Briggs, Betty Jane Hylton, Ned Irwin, and, of course, the Friends.

Manuscript Collections

While not a focus for collection development, the department does receive occasional donations of manuscript collections that help document the county's history. During the year, the following collections were added: Accession 15: Bob Hope Collection; Accession 16: Postcard Collection; Accession 19: and Martha C. Marshall Collection. We thank the following for these donations: The Bob and Dolores Hope Foundation, Burbank, California; Henry Higgins, Greeneville, Tennessee.; Betty Jane Hylton, Johnson City, Tennessee; and Linda Edwards, Jonesborough, Tennessee.

On May 5th, 2020 the department returned to Tom Wallace, secretary of Rhea Lodge No. 47, three folders of early lodge records (1824-1862 and undated) that were found in the Fink papers returned from the McClung Historical Collection in August 2019.

Map Collection

In January 2020, Betty Jane donated a 1964 United States wall map showing the various acquisitions of territory and a 1968 topographic map of the Nashville East quadrangle. We thank her for this donation.

Microfilm Collection

The department's microfilm collection was inaugurated on September 10th, 2019 when Lucy Gump of Johnson City donated a microfilm reader and 23 reels of microfilm. The microfilm includes important North Carolina land grants made in Tennessee in the 18th Century, as well as film of the Wataugah Purchase book (deeds), indices to early deeds for Washington County, Carter County, and Sullivan County, and early loose Washington County records for the period 1774-1881.

Additional donations were made by Donna Cox Briggs (9 reels) and Steve Watson, Santa Teresa, New Mexico (10 reels). All the film was of early Washington County or surrounding counties. The Friends of the Washington County Archives donated \$50 for

the purchase of two reels of early Jonesborough newspapers. We thank all for their donations.

Photograph Collection

The collection continues to grow slowly. During the year, Betty Jane Hylton donated photographs of the old Mountain View School and of Tri-City Airport.

Records Management

Plans to update an inventory of records in various county offices last done in 2012-2013 were put on hold by the pandemic. In July 2019, library files for 2015-2016 of the Washington County-Jonesborough Library were transferred to the archives by Richard Griffith, library director.

Reference and Public Service

The pandemic changed everything about reference service beginning in mid-March 2020. The Reading Room was closed to the public from March 23-May 29, 2020. During this period, all research inquiries were handled by email, mail, or telephone. Volunteers began returning to work in early May. A few have still not returned as of this writing. Prior to the public closure, the archives was averaging around 100 inquiries per month. There was a drop in inquiries of about 13% during closure. Curiously, this figure corresponds to the drop in consumer spending experienced in America in April 2020. The importance of internet, telephone and email connections with the world was proven during the period of closure or our reference statistics would have suffered an even more dramatic decline.

A total of **1,232** reference inquiries was handled compared to 1,024 in 2018-2019. This represents (even with the pandemic closure) a **17%** increase. Inquiries came from **32** different states, as follows : Tennessee, Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming.

In-person visitors to the archive totaled **727** individual researchers. This is a **20%** increase over the previous year despite the pandemic closure. The majority (653) were Tennessee residents. There were 74 researchers from a total of 19 other states and two foreign countries (Canada and New Zealand). Among the states represented were Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Archive staff consulted with and advised the City of Johnson City's Development Services Department on an archive records grant project and wrote a supporting letter for a Tennessee Archives Management Advisory grant. We also consulted with Melissa Barker of Houston County Archives on the recovery of county records, and assisted Dr. Donald Shafer in his research on African-American history in Washington County.

Website and Social Media

The department's website continued to broaden its reach on the World Wide Web. During the year, there were a total of **6,920** visitors to the site conducting a total of **68,365** views. This compares with 4,951 visitors and 59,195 views the previous year. Researchers represented 33 different countries (up from 25 last year), as follows: Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Caribbean Netherlands, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar (Burma), Netherlands, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam.

Record group online guides for Circuit Court, Clerk and Master (Chancery Court), County Clerk (County Court), Superior Court of Law and Equity, and Tennessee State Supreme Court were revised, as many new documents recovered in 2019 were incorporated.

There were 51 postings made to the Friends of the Washington County Archives Facebook page regarding the department. We have noticed that when a post is made containing a link back to our website, there is a definite increase in visitors to the site.

Staffing and Volunteers

Britney Hilton, who had been volunteering, became the department's newest employee, when she began working part-time March 10th, 2020. Britney drives all the way from Rogersville, and we are very fortunate to have her working here. She is currently working on her information science master's degree online from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. We also added three new volunteers: Carolyn Andrews (began in September), Nina Langley and Terry Millhorn (both began in January 2020). This now brings the total number of volunteers to eight, including Georgia Greer, Janette Guinn, Shirley Hinds, Margaret Houglan, and Betty Jane Hylton.

These wonderful volunteers dedicated a total of 1,658 hours of their lives to work in the archives. This is the equivalent of having another full-time employee for 221 days of the year at no cost! We thank all of them for their hard work and dedication.

During the pandemic closure, we kept connected to the volunteers through a weekly email titled "News from the Front." This proved popular. Volunteer hours were reduced

somewhat from last year due to two factors: the pandemic closure of the department, so that volunteers were not able to work from March 23 into early May, and the fact that Britney Helton went from volunteer status to a part-time department employee.

Public Records Commission

The commission is composed of the following members: Register of Deeds Teresa Bowman, Commissioner Mike Ford (Chairman), Gene Hurdt, County Archivist Ned Irwin (Secretary), Dr. William Kennedy, County Historian John Kiener (Vice-Chairman), Chancellor John Rambo, and County Clerk Kathy Storey. A meeting was held on October 1st, 2019. The commission usually meets again in the spring, but these plans were halted by the pandemic.

Friends of the Archives

The Friends continued their on-going and highly valued support of the archives program in 2019-2020. FOA funds were used to purchase copies of 16 court case files of Tennessee State Supreme Court cases that originated in Washington County. A total of 24 books were purchased and added to the department's reference Book Collection at a cost of \$374.54.

The project to decorate the Reading Room with original oil paintings of Jonesborough artist Peggy Root continued with the purchase and installation of the painting "Summer: Queen Anne's Lace Looking North Toward Leesburg" on January 28th, 2020. Two more seasonal paintings (Autumn and Winter) are planned.

As part of its' outreach efforts, FOA expanded their Facebook postings and began publishing an electronic newsletter. The group continues to underwrite the cost of maintaining our website.

The FOA contributed a total of **\$7,004.74** in support of the department during the year. Peggy Daugherty of Santa Ana, California made a \$100 donation to the Friends in December 2019.

The Year Ahead

- Processing projects on various court records will continue in 2020-2021.
- Staff will focus more on records management collaboration with county office holders, especially regarding electronic record-keeping.
- There is a continuing need for additional records storage space for contemporary county records, ideally a separate records center facility for in-active but not historic county records. Storage space in the archive building and Archive Annex is rapidly being filled.