



EARLIEST LAND RECORDS ARE RETURNING TO WASHINGTON COUNTY

It's coming home! Deed Book A, sometimes called the Watauga Purchase book, which contains the earliest land records for Washington County and, thus, for Tennessee, is being returned to the county after an absence of 124 years.

"This is a great day for the citizens of Washington County, past, present, and future," said County Archivist Ned Irwin. "The Public Records Commission identified recovery of county documents as a priority and, over the past two years, we have recovered over 12,000 documents that had left the county's custody. But Deed Book A is the most significant of all county records."

The volume contains the earliest deeds and land grants for the county, beginning with the indenture made in March 1775 between the earliest settlers and the Cherokee chiefs to purchase land holdings in what became Washington County and its' surrounding area. "All land titles in the present day trace their claims back to the records found in this book," Irwin said.

Deed Book A was sent to Nashville in 1897 as part of the county's exhibit during the Tennessee State Centennial celebrations and never returned. For several years now, the county has disagreed with the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) over the book's ownership. This past January, the County Commission unanimously adopted a resolution requesting the return of the deed book. State Senators Rusty Crowe and Jon Lundberg and State Representatives Rebecca Alexander, and Tim Hicks, with the unanimous support of the Northeast Tennessee Caucus of the General Assembly, worked throughout the session with Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett to secure the deed book's return to the county.

This week, in a bold and decisive move, Secretary Hargett, who oversees the TSLA, took a fresh look at the facts the county recently clarified and made the decision that the volume belongs to Washington County and will be returned in the near future. “Secretary Hargett should be always remembered by the citizens of this county for taking the courageous action he took on our behalf,” Irwin said.

“Locally, it took a team to get this book returned, and in our public officials and every private individual who helped and supported the effort, we had the greatest team one could have,” Irwin said. “I especially want to thank Mayor Joe Grandy, who made this a personal priority, and County Attorney Allyson Wilkinson and my archives associate Donna Cox Briggs, who were invaluable.”

A public celebration is planned on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 in conjunction with the book’s return. More details will be forthcoming on this momentous event.

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