

SIX COUNTY DOCUMENTS RETURNED BY TWO INSTITUTIONS

The return of Deed Book A, Washington County's first deed book, on June 1st, 2021, overshadowed the return around the same time of six historic county records from two other institutions. These documents are significant in their own way and should not be overlooked in passing. Each helps document important aspects in the history of our county.

The first three documents were returned by the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These comprised the John Bayles Collection there and consisted of Bayles' attempt between 1820 and 1830 to grant "a slave named Jenny" her freedom. Included were an emancipating petition, a court document, and a bill of sale.

Three other documents were discovered by archives staff to be at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in New York City. One document was an 1801 court document signed by Andrew Jackson when he was a judge in Jonesborough on the Court of Equity. Another was an 1825 petition of David Nelson to emancipate two slaves named Sylvia and Alfred. The third document was an 1845 court document in the case State vs. Zacheriah Allen.

Under Tennessee law (and that of many other states, including North Carolina and New York) public records always remain public records, and under this legal principle, the documents were replevined from both places. We thank the staff at both institutions for returning the documents to Washington County and for the courtesy and professionalism shown throughout the recovery process, which because of the COVID-19 pandemic, delayed the return of these documents to their home.

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