

# Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program, 1990-2014

Vince Brooks, Senior Local Records Archivist



**LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA**

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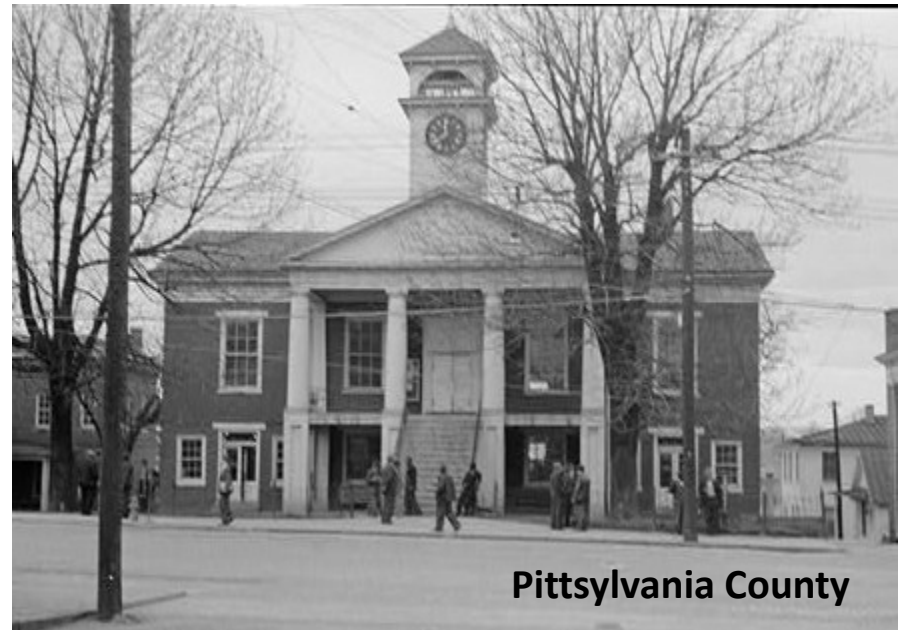
## THE FALL OF RICHMOND VA. ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 2<sup>ND</sup> 1865.

*This strong hold and Capital City of the Davis Confederacy, was evacuated by the Rebels in consequence of the defeat at "Five Forks" of the Army of Northern Virginia under Lee, and capture of the South side Rail Road, by the brave heroes of the North, commanded by Generals Grant, Sheridan and others. — Before abandoning the City the Rebels set fire to it, destroying a vast amount of property, and the conflagration continued until it was subdued by the Union troops in the following morning.*

Wm. D. Hinckley.



**Greene County**



**Pittsylvania County**



**Nottoway County**



**Mecklenburg County**

1970

- Botetourt County courthouse fire destroys or damages considerable portion of historical records
- Senate Joint Resolution 22 introduced calling for survey of record-keeping practices in local courthouses

1971

- LVA staff conducts courthouse visits to assess conditions of record and record-keeping practices
- Aimed to capitalize on existing microfilming program
- Also to assess developments since previous surveys in 1930s

1972

- Archives tasked with formulating and executing a program to inventory and microfilm official records of counties and cities
- General Assembly funds first 2 years of program
- Local Records Services program begins

1973

- Security microfilming effort undertaken within Local Records Services
- Virginia divided into 5 districts with microfilm techs assigned to each
- General Assembly undertakes a study of the need for a public records act

1976

- Virginia Public Records Act passed by the General Assembly
- Sets standards for records and record-keeping
- Defines the archival role of the State Library

1977

- Buchanan County courthouse floods destroying vital records

1978-1980s

- Significant increase in transfers of original records to the LVA as a result of the security microfilming program

1989-1990

- LVA & SHRAB complete 40 preservation site surveys of institutions holding historical records collections
- Used \$50K grant from NHPRC to fund inquiry
- Surveys showed greatest preservation need at circuit court level

1990

- VA Circuit Court Clerk's Assoc., LVA, and key legislators introduce bill to dedicate \$1 of recordation fee to preservation of court records creating the CCRP program at the LVA
- Grants administrator hired; program developed

1992

- First round of grant applications awarded for long- and short-term preservation needs
- Key areas: Processing, Microfilm storage/maintenance, conservation grants, security systems, microfilm reader/printers, and emergency grants
- LVA processing archivists hired to address 20,000 cu. ft. of local court archives, including chancery

1993

- Early grant awards for smoke & fire detection equipment and item conservation
- Seven(7) additional positions @ LVA sought to address backlog of processing

Late  
1990s

- Focus concentrated on chancery records because of their extensive informational value
- Originally geared toward genealogical research, but greater potential for varied research realized in the last decade

2001

- Recording fee dedicated to preservation increased to \$1.50

2003-2004

- Over \$3 m. in CCRP revenue transferred to the state's general operating fund by Gen'l Assembly

2005

- Reformatting efforts heavily geared toward digital to capitalize on Chancery Records Index metadata

2008

- \$1.25 m. in CCRP funds "diverted" to the state's general operating fund by the Gen'l Assembly
- Downturn in real estate market has deep impact on CCRP funding

2009

- Gen'l Assembly forces LVA to use \$1 m. in CCRP funds to offset cuts to its general fund revenue

2013-2014

- To date, over \$16 m. disbursed through more than 1,100 grants
- Nearly 10 m. digital chancery images for 237,000 suits

# The Code of Virginia

§ 17.1-275. Fees collected by clerks of circuit courts; generally.

A. A clerk of a circuit court shall, for services performed by virtue of his office, charge the following fees:

2. “...One dollar and fifty cents of the fee collected for recording and indexing shall be designated for use in preserving the permanent records of the circuit courts. The sum collected for this purpose **shall be administered by The Library of Virginia in cooperation with the circuit court clerks.**”









Bowwell  
B...  
Deed  
Recorded, and  
Examined  
Clerk  
The day of...

Sniffers  
Deed  
Buntow  
Recorded  
and  
Examined









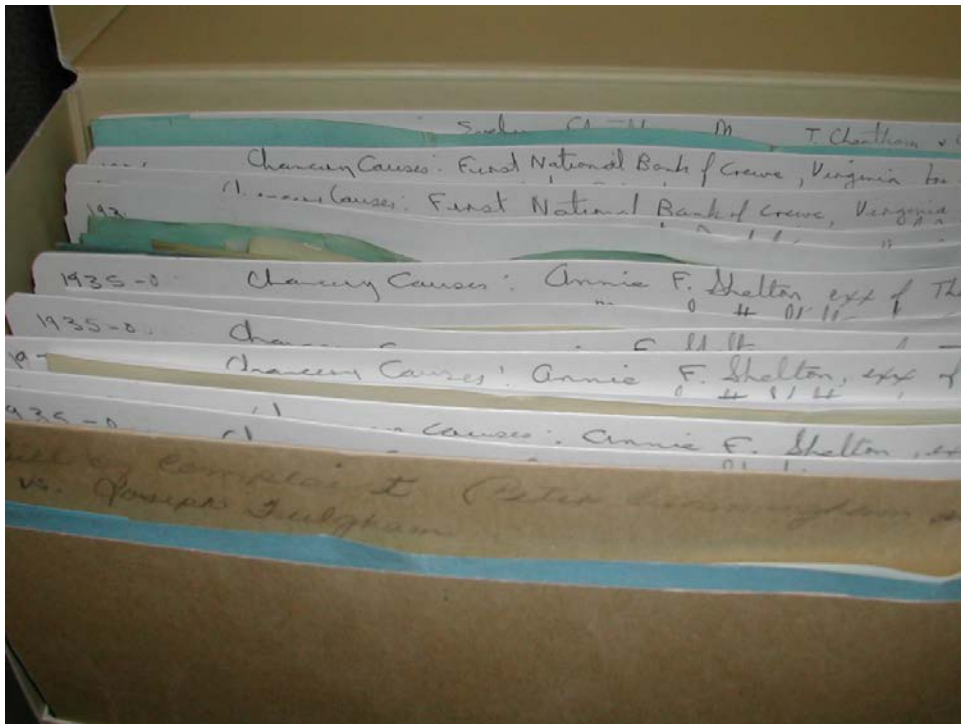






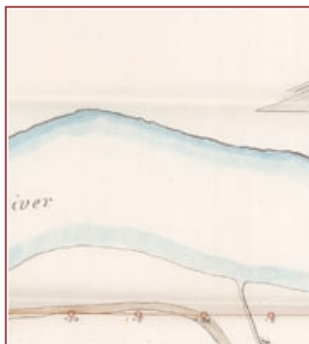








## CHANCERY RECORDS INDEX



Chancery Records Index

### Scanning in Progress:

Elizabeth City County,  
1747-1913  
Madison County, 1794-1913

The Chancery Records Index (CRI) is a result of archival processing and indexing projects overseen by the Library of Virginia (LVA) and funded, in part, by the Virginia Circuit Court Records Preservation Program (CCRP). Each of Virginia's circuit courts created chancery records that contain considerable historical and genealogical information. Because the records rely so heavily on testimony from witnesses, they offer a unique glimpse into the lives of Virginians from the early 18th century through the First World War.

The original court papers are flat-filed, indexed, and conserved using a set of standards developed by the LVA. Since the tri-folded records are often in poor condition, special attention is paid to preparing them for digital reformatting. This laborious process is undertaken so that the best quality images can be captured in one effort. The valuable original records are then retired to secure storage.

The reformatted images—whether digital scans or microfilm—can be viewed at the Library of Virginia, at the circuit court clerk's office, or, in the case of digital images, from any internet connected computer. The indexed but-not-yet-reformatted original records in the Library's care can be viewed in the Archives Research Room prior to reformatting. During reformatting, some or all of the original records may be unavailable for viewing; however, the full index will remain available for research purposes. Information is added to the CRI in such instances to alert researchers regarding a collection's [availability](#).

There are over 233,000 cases indexed in the database and nearly 8 million images of chancery causes available online.

[FAQ](#)  
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Virginia Court Clerks' Association  
Serving Virginia's Circuit Court Clerks  
since 1910



# Chancery Records Index

[Close Case Details](#)

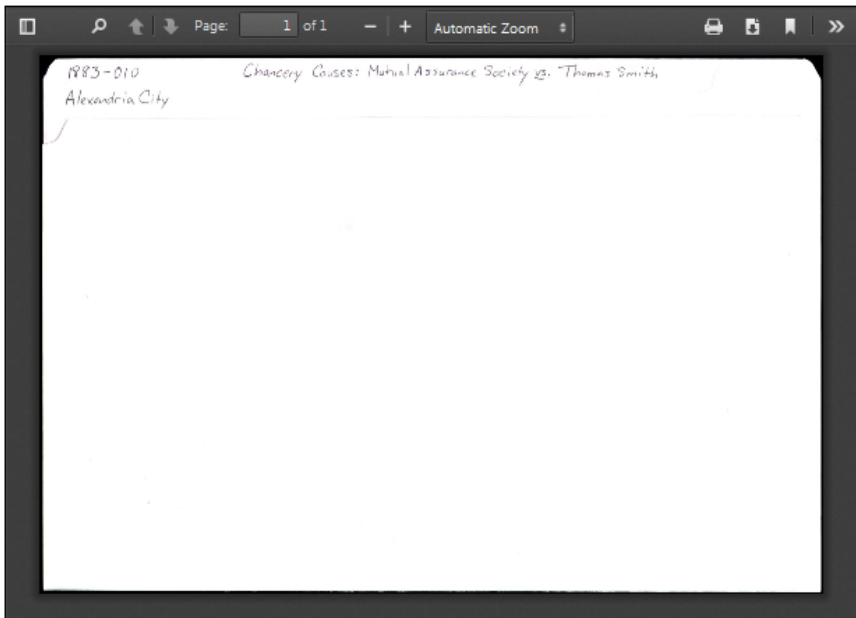
Locality	Index Number	Original Case Number
ALEXANDRIA CITY	1883-010	
Plaintiff(s)	Defendant(s)	
MUTUAL ASSURANCE SOCIETY AGAINST FIRE IN BUILDINGS IN THE STATE OF VIRGINIA]	THOMAS SMITH	
Surname(s)		
MUTUAL ASSURANCE SOCIETY AGAINST FIRE IN BUILDINGS IN THE STATE OF VIRGINIA]		
SMITH		
Wills	Plat?	
	YES	
Format		
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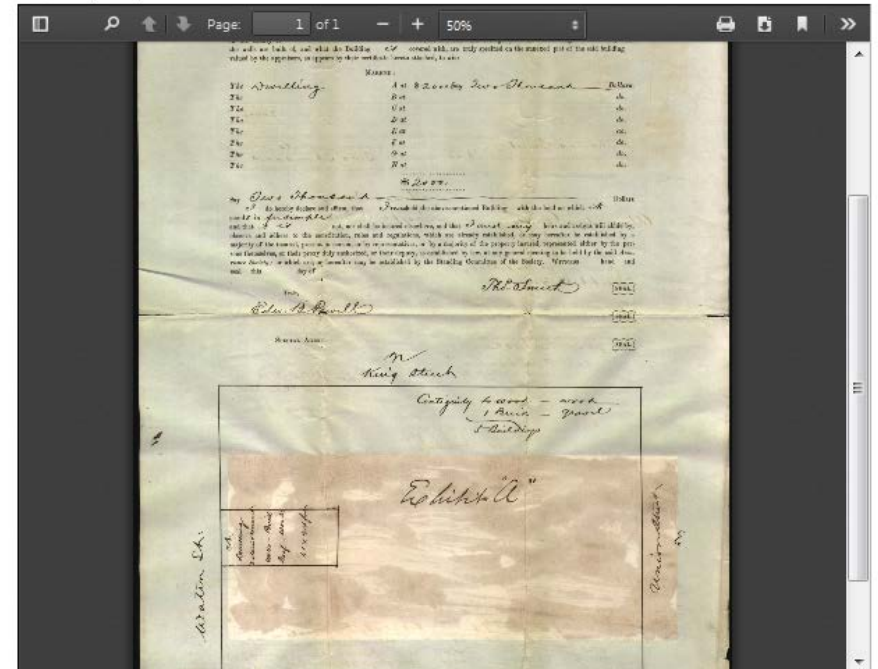
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## Challenges

- Funding stream dependent upon real estate market
- Field (In-locality) processing model
- Being connected to geographically disbursed constituent community
- Pot of money sitting around in state govt 😞
- Funding only supports circuit court records, not other types of local govt records in need of preservation
- Born-digital records have not been addressed and are increasingly common
- Adapting program to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of circuit courts

## Opportunities

- Chance to connect with 120 widely disbursed constituent communities through grant awards & expertise
- Utilizing the support of the VA Circuit Court Clerks' Assoc. to influence resource allocators
- Partnering with LVA Records Analysts for comprehensive site visits
- Leveraging connections with regional colleges/universities for processing project interns
- Digital project's broad impact-genealogists, scholars, title researchers, students, social media fodder, etc.



# Thank you!

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