



The Virginia Colonial Records Project

The Virginia Colonial Records Project was established in the mid-1950s by the Virginia Historical Society, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the University of Virginia Library, and the Virginia State Library (now the Library of Virginia) to reconstitute the archive of Virginia's colonial history that was lost because of statehouse fires at Jamestown, wars, and other natural disasters. Between 1955 and 1985, project agents visited more than one hundred libraries and archives in Great Britain, Ireland, and France to survey their collections for Virginia-related documents. Agents reported their findings about pertinent records on specially created forms identified as Survey Reports from which the project ordered microfilm of many original documents.

Most of the documents surveyed were created between 1607 and 1783. Included are correspondence between British officials and colonial officers, customs records, business records, claims of British merchants concerning Virginia stores, log books, ships' cargo lists, Loyalists' claims, depositions, and chancery proceedings of British courts. It is not a comprehensive collection of Virginia's colonial records, nor does it include ships' passenger lists or local records that remained in the colony, such as wills recorded at the county court.

Records Availability

The project has microfilm copies of approximately two-thirds of the records identified on the Survey Reports. Microfilm copies of the documents and the Survey Reports are available for research by the public at the four participating institutions listed above as well as the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation at the Jamestown Settlement Library. Microfilm may be borrowed through Interlibrary Loan from the Library of Virginia and the Manuscripts Department of the University of Virginia Library.

The call number for the Library of Virginia's microfilm is Film 1607. When borrowing from the Library of Virginia, please ask for this film number and the specific reel number you need (noted on the catalog record).

The Virginia Colonial Records Project does not hold reproduction rights for the documents from the foreign repositories. Thus, the Library of Virginia CANNOT provide copies of documents described in the Survey Reports. Requests for copies of documents should be addressed to the repository holding the original document.

Online Database

A database to the Survey Reports is available on the Library of Virginia's Web site. Go to www.lva.virginia.gov and click on "Site Index" at the bottom of the page. Click on "V" and then "Virginia Colonial Records Project." Another way to access the database is through the Library of Virginia's online catalog. Go to the Web site above and click on "Search the LVA Catalog" in the "For the Public" section. Once in the catalog, click on the "Images & Indexes" tab. Scroll through the list of databases and double click on "Virginia Colonial Records Project."

Researchers may search by keyword (Words Anywhere), repository, personal name, title, ship name, and system number. Survey Report numbers may be searched using the “Words Anywhere” search option. Search tips may be found in the online catalog’s “Help” section. A few hints are given below:

Keyword (Words Anywhere) search – Enter a word, a phrase (click on “Yes” for “Words adjacent?”), or several words. The following fields are searched: repository, personal name, title, ship name, and Survey Report number. If you put in several words, records in which all the words appear will be retrieved.

You may search for specific new Survey Report numbers using the Words Anywhere search. An explanation of old and new Survey Report numbers can be found under “Survey Reports” in this document. Enter the five digits of the NEW Survey Report number. If the Survey Report number has fewer than five digits, fill in the spaces with the number 0 (e.g., 00024).

Repository search – Enter as much of the repository name as you know. Use the “Words in Repository” search option or the “Repository begins with ...” in the “Browse an Alphabetical List” search. If uncertain of the exact name, a keyword (Words in Repository) search may give better results.

Subject search – A “Words in Subject” search will search for personal names and ship names that are listed in the subject fields of the catalog record.

Title search – Enter as much of the title as you know. Use the “Words in Title” search option or the “Title begins with ...” in the “Browse an Alphabetical List” search. If uncertain of the exact name, a keyword (Words in Title) search may give better results.

System Number search – Each record in the online catalog has a unique number assigned to it. If you already know the system number for a particular record, you can enter it here.

Personal Name search – Personal names are listed in the catalog records as subjects. Use the “Words in Subject” search option or the “Personal Name as Subject (last name first)” in the “Browse an Alphabetical List” search. When doing a keyword (Words in Subject) search, it is not necessary to put the first name and surname in a particular order. When searching for personal names, it is often helpful to browse an alphabetical list by searching for a surname only. If unsuccessful in your search, try variant spellings.

Ship Name search – Ship names are listed in the catalog records as subjects. Use the “Words in Subject” search option or the “Ship Name begins with ...” in the “Browse an Alphabetical List” search. Enter variant spellings if necessary.

You may also use an “Advanced Search” option by clicking on “Va. Colonial Records Advanced Search” on the main search screen. The Advanced Search gives you the option to combine search terms.

Catalog Record

Once a search has been executed, a list of retrieved records will display. If you do any type of keyword search (i.e., Words in Repository, Words Anywhere, etc.), the results screen will list the authors (repositories) and titles.

Each record will have an underlined number next to it. Click on the number to see the full catalog record. If you conduct a search using the “Browse an Alphabetical List” option, the results screen will list underlined entries. Click on the entry you wish to see.

The catalog record will list some or all of the following:

- A link to the online image of the Survey Report
- Survey Report number
- Microfilm reel number (if the documents were filmed)
- Repository where the manuscript is held and class identification of the manuscript or collection at that repository
- Title, which usually summarizes the manuscript's contents
- Date(s)
- Subject headings of personal names and/or ship names included in the Survey Report
- A unique system number that identifies it within the entire online catalog

Each personal name and ship name identified on the Survey Report is followed by the page number of the Survey Report where the name can be found. Please note that the page numbers in the catalog record correspond to the Survey Reports rather than to the manuscript records.

Example of a catalog record:

URL (Click on link)	http://image.lva.virginia.gov/VTLS/CR/07260/index.html Survey Report Image
Survey Report No.	SR 07260
Microfilm Reel No.	637
Author	Bodleian Library Class Rawlinson MSS A 180.
Title	Declaration of the People of Virginia against the Governor, Sir William Berkeley
Publication	[1676]
Gen. note	Andrews Guide 384. Catalogus Codd. MSS. Bibliothecae Bodleianae. Pars V. Codices R. Rawlinson, 184
Note	637
Subject - Personal	Bacon, Nathaniel — [1676], SR 07260, p. 1. Berkeley, William, Sir. — Governor — (Va.) — [1676], SR 07260, p. 1.
System Number	000708572

Survey Reports

The Survey Reports summarize the information found in manuscript records and are available online and on microfilm. Each report lists the name of the repository where the items are housed, class identification, title, dates of the manuscript or collection, bibliographical references, and a description of the manuscripts.

The large number stamped at the upper-right corner of each Survey Report is the new Survey Report number. New Survey Report numbers identify the 14,704 VCRP Survey Reports according to a numbering sequence employed since 1972. Some reports also have an old Survey Report number. This number, typed at the upper right corner, was used to identify reports according to a numbering sequence used between 1955 and 1972. The old Survey Report number is not searchable in the online database.

To see the online image of a Survey Report, click on the URL at the top of the catalog record. Because Survey Report images appear in a new window, any pop-up blocker software installed on your computer must be disabled. Each page must be viewed separately. A TIFF viewer is required to view the reports. TIFF tips and downloading information may be found in the window that displays the links to the Survey Report page numbers.

The microfilm copies of the Survey Reports are filed at the end of the Virginia Colonial Records Project microfilm collection, housed in the Archives Reference Reading Room of the Library of Virginia.

Microfilm of Documents

Approximately two-thirds of the records surveyed by the Virginia Colonial Records Project were filmed. The microfilm may be ordered from the closed stacks. Sometimes entire documents were filmed and other times only specific pages were filmed. The Survey Reports will note specific page numbers copied.

The reel numbers will be found on the third line of the catalog card in the online database as well as in the final column in the two-volume compilation *A Key to Survey Reports and Microfilm of the Virginia Colonial Records Project* (1990). Reel numbers are sometimes noted on the Survey Report; the absence of a reel number on the Survey Report does not necessarily mean that the document has not been microfilmed.

Obtaining Manuscripts Not Available on VCRP Microfilm

Requests for copies of documents not available on VCRP microfilm should be addressed to the repository holding the original record. Library of Virginia reference librarians and archivists can assist you in obtaining addresses.

Related Print Resources

A list of published finding aids and other resources related to the Virginia Colonial Records Project may be found online at www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/vcrpabout.htm

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