

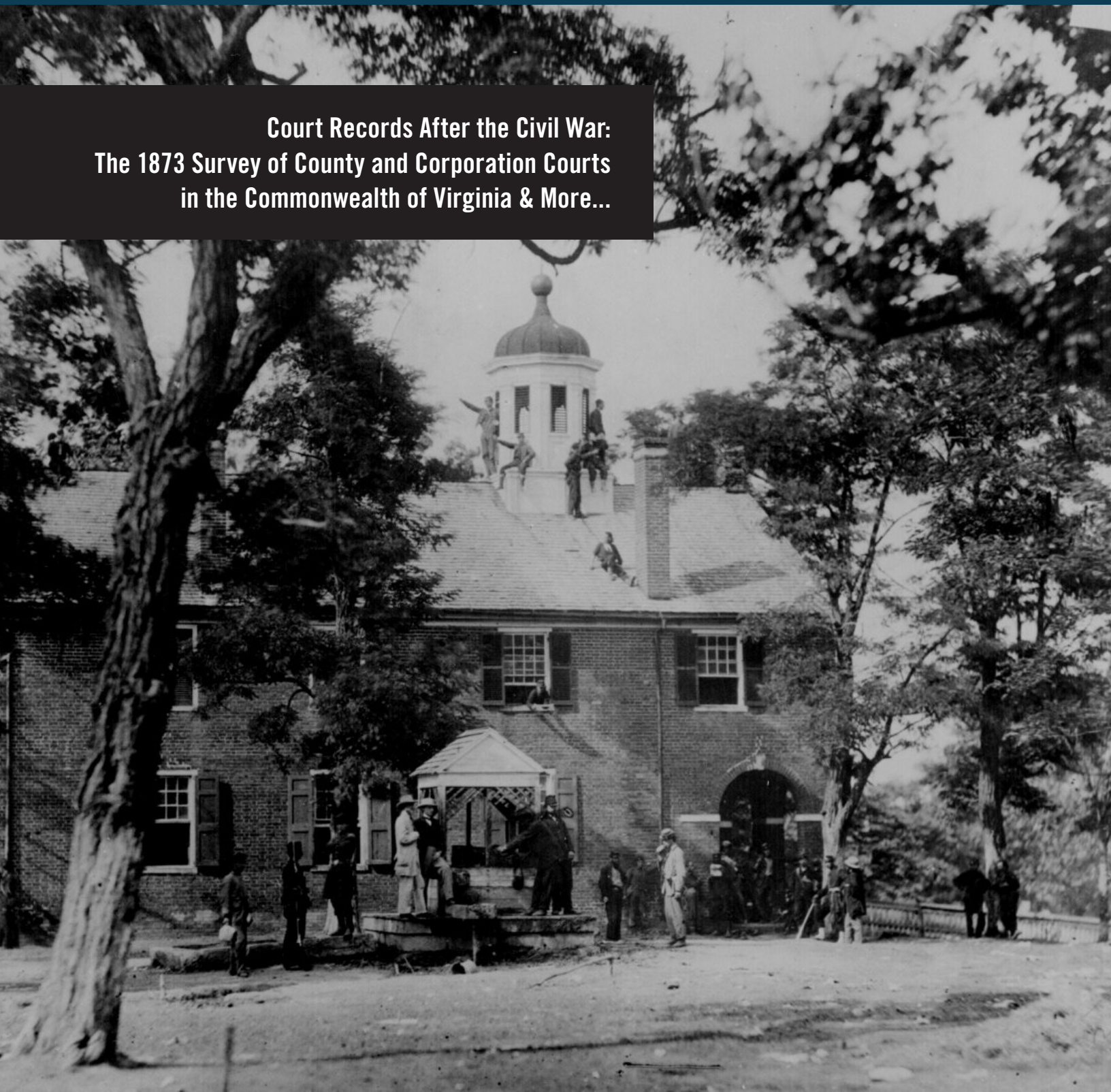
The Newsletter of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program ■ No. 19 ■ Spring 2026

CCRP NEWS



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

**Court Records After the Civil War:
The 1873 Survey of County and Corporation Courts
in the Commonwealth of Virginia & More...**



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No. 19 ■ Spring 2026

This newsletter is published twice a year to keep circuit court clerks informed about the court records preservation program for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Reader participation is invited.

LIBRARIAN OF VIRGINIA
Dennis T. Clark

STATE ARCHIVIST & DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNMENT RECORDS SERVICES
Greg Crawford
gregory.crawford@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3505

LOCAL RECORDS SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGER
Vincent Brooks
vincent.brooks@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3525

SENIOR LOCAL RECORDS ARCHIVIST
Tracy Harter
tracy.harter@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3639

SENIOR LOCAL RECORDS ARCHIVIST
Eddie Woodward
eddie.woodward@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3650

CONSERVATOR
Leslie Courtois
leslie.courtois@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3511

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Michelle Washington
michelle.washington@lva.virginia.gov
804.692.3605

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Christine Brooks

COPY EDITORS
Angela Flagg
Mary-Peyton Crook



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

LOCAL RECORDS SERVICES
800 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804.692.3505
804.692.2277 fax
www.lva.virginia.gov



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Above: Federal soldiers at the Appomattox Court House, April 1865. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Cover image: Union soldiers in front of and on the roof of the Fairfax Court House, June 1863. National Archives photo no. 528872.

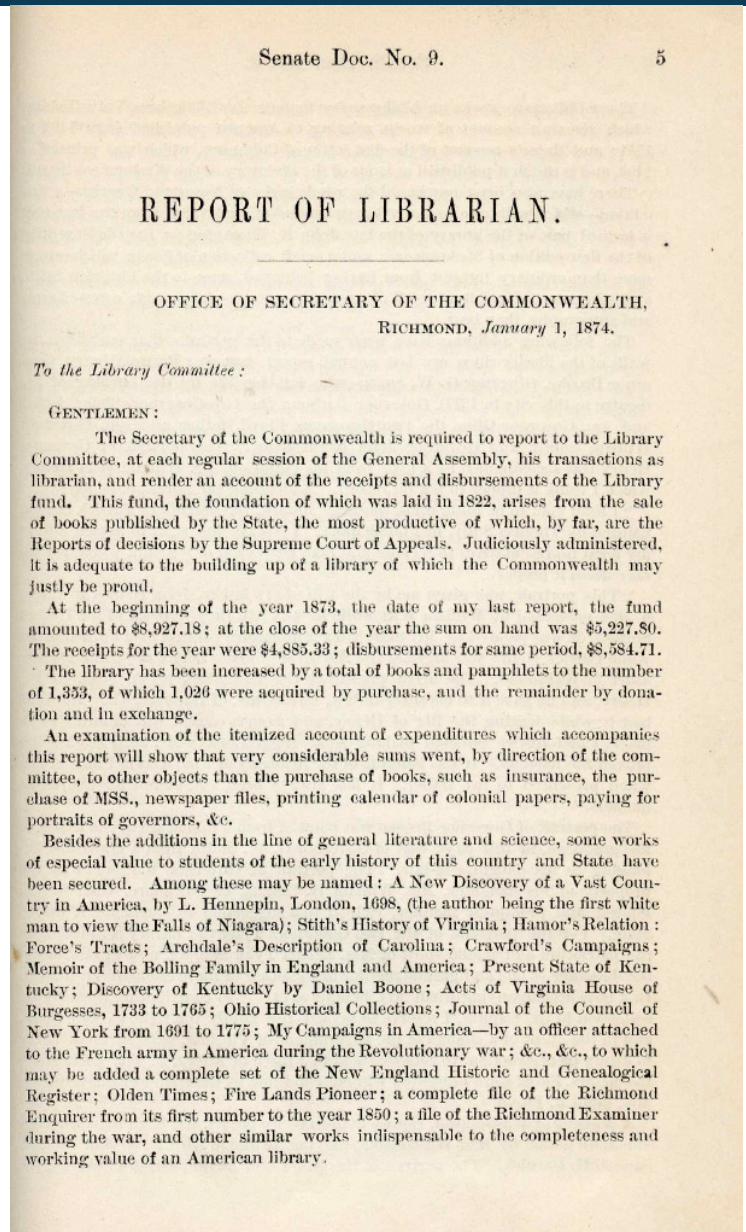
Court Records After the Civil War: The 1873 Survey of County and Corporation Courts in the Commonwealth of Virginia

While the Circuit Court Records Preservation program has been in existence since the early 1990s, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Library of Virginia can document their court records preservation efforts back to the Civil War and possibly earlier. Library resources, such as the records of the state archivists, the voluminous “Locality Receipt Files,” periodic courthouse inventories and surveys and library publications, all help to document various aspects of these preservation efforts. Time, events and the elements play major factors in the survival of courthouse records, and if one takes into account the fact that many of Virginia’s courthouses — some with records that date to the 1630s — were ravaged by two wars, the survival of the records is all the more impressive.

During the Civil War, the state government in Richmond recognized the threat that the invading armies posed to the courthouses and local governments of the region. In 1864, in an effort to preserve local government records, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation encouraging courthouses in the path of Union forces to move their records to the state capital for safekeeping. As the resolution did not mandate their transfer, not every city or county followed through. Those localities that chose to retain their court records and take their chances with the Northern armies turned out to have made the wisest decision because on April 3, 1865, with the fall of Richmond, those records that had been transferred to the state capital were destroyed.

During the war, city and county court records either survived, were mangled or destroyed or were looted. The first survey of the clerks’ offices that we are aware of was performed after the Civil War, in 1873, and was published in the “Senate Doc No. IX, Annual Report of the Joint Committee of the State Library,” the following year. The annual report served as something of a “state-of-the-state library” report by the secretary of the Commonwealth, who at that time functioned as the state librarian (or according to the report, as the *ex officio* librarian). A report such as this contains a lot of information that would be expected regarding the state library, such as the increase in the number of books and manuscripts for that year, as well as the expenditures involved in operating the library. This particular report, however, also contained the findings from a survey sent to all of the clerks’ offices.

Because of the devastation wrought by the war, the Senate created a “circular letter” (or questionnaire) that was sent to all county and corporation (or incorporated city) courts of the state. The form letter had numerous questions regarding the clerks’ offices, including the



The first page of, “Senate Doc. No. IX, Annual Report of the Joint Committee of the State Library, Submitted to the Senate, and Ordered to Be Printed February 19, 1874.”

processing or administration of court records, whether their offices contained relics, artifacts or maps, whether they had any “weights or measures,” and whether they had “any impressions of seals” connected with the office “or with any portion of the state.” It also inquired about the records. Regarding, “proceedings of court, wills, deeds, &c., that are matters of record or file in your office,” they

were asked to provide the “date of the oldest, and whether or not they are continuous to the present time; and if not, to what periods they extend, and the omissions in their continuity.” If the records were in volumes, the clerks were asked to provide the date range “embraced in each book,” and also, “the condition of each one of the volumes, as to preservation, legibility, and other particulars?” Unfortunately, “very few responded, and still fewer manifested any interest in the matter.”

Surveys and inventories are vital for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that they can help provide intellectual control over a collection. At their heart, they are a necessary component of a records management program. However, historical surveys and inventories such as these provide a snapshot in time and a benchmark to gauge the continuity and condition of records at a later date. The surveys support preservation by ensuring that historical records are identified and preserved. Obviously, having an inventory of the collection facilitates access for researchers.

So, it is disappointing that of the about 100 or so court clerks’ offices in the Commonwealth of Virginia, only 26 responded. Also unfortunate is the degree of specificity (or effort) each clerk put into responding to the questionnaire; or possibly that some of them didn’t understand the assignment. The 26 that responded were from the counties of Alleghany, Caroline, Charles City, Fairfax, Fauquier, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Greene, Halifax, Hanover, Henrico, Highland, Lancaster, Madison, Middlesex, Nelson, Northumberland, Page, Pittsylvania, Rappahannock, Rockingham, and Sussex, and the cities of Charlottesville, Petersburg and Richmond. The responses ranged in length, with some providing great details — such as Henrico County and the city of Richmond at one end of the spectrum — and some one-sentence replies from clerks, such as that from Nelson County: “no weights and measures, no records, documents, relics, maps,

nor any other property of any kind, except a seal for each court; no impression of seal or description sent”. Admittedly, these were “Abstracts of the Replies,” however it is difficult to imagine that Nelson County’s response was embellished in any way, shape or form.

Some of the clerks described the damage caused by the war and Northern soldiers, such as the clerk in Sussex County, J. D. Thornton, who indicated that most of the records from the county’s inception in 1754 survived, “with the exception of the will-book for the years 1856 to 1863 inclusive, which was taken away by Northern soldiers in 1864.” Thornton went on to say that the records were “generally well preserved, but were much defaced by the soldiers stationed there from May until November 1865 (after the surrender), by writing



Union soldiers and horses outside the Charles City County Court House, June 13, 1864. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

VALUABLE HISTORICAL PAPERS.
Mr. WYNNE, from the Committee on the Library, presented the following:
Resolved (the House of Delegates concurring), That the County Court of Charles City county be requested to transfer the marriage-license bond of Thomas Jefferson to the Secretary of the Commonwealth to be preserved among the historical documents in the State library.
Resolved, That the County Court of Fairfax county be requested to deposit the will of General Washington, now in the office of the clerk of the County Court, with the Secretary of the Commonwealth for the purpose of being preserved with the historical papers in the State library.
Resolved, That the Circuit Court of Albemarle be requested to place the will of Thaddeus Kosciuszko in the possession of the Secretary of the Commonwealth for the purpose of having the same preserved with other historical documents.
 On motion of Mr. WYNNE, the report was taken up and agreed to.

Excerpt from a General Assembly of Virginia article in the Daily Dispatch, Volume 46, No. 80, April 3, 1874.



Union soldiers at the Fairfax Court House, June 1863. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

upon the records and tearing out the leaves." Northumberland County clerk W. J. Cralle noted that while the oldest "proceedings of the courts" volume, 1652–1665, was "very much mutilated," the volumes from 1678 on were nearly continuous, but "not in a good state of preservation."

When everything was gone, their responses could be pretty concise, such as that from John R. Taylor from Hanover County: "All of the records of this office prior to the 3d of April, 1865, were destroyed." Also short and sweet was J. T. Logan, clerk for Rockingham County, who, in commencing his response, stated, "All of our records and other property connected with this office were destroyed by fire in 1864." Middlesex County clerk P. J. Woodward succinctly reported that "There is nothing of interest in this office." He also indicated that they had some old seals and church registers in his office, but they had been "carried off by the enemy in May, 1863, and have never been heard from since."

In some instances, little remained except for a few memorable records, as noted by the Charles City County deputy clerk Edmund Waddill, who reported, "Records destroyed during the war, no papers or books saved except the marriage-license bond of Mr. Jefferson," which he suggested should be sent to the "State archives for preservation." Robert Hudgins, the clerk of courts for Caroline County, noted that, except for a 1732–1740 minute book, all of the old records of the county were destroyed after the "advance of Grant's army on Richmond in May, 1864, when the office was sacked and the books and papers generally destroyed." Fairfax County clerk P. D. Richardson responded, outlining mixed preservation results from the war: "The records of the court are continuous from 1742 to the present time, with the exceptions of 1862, '63, and '64; we have a general index to wills and deeds from 1742 to the present time; the original deeds and wills were destroyed during the war, and fifteen

volumes of land records were also destroyed." The clerk went on to note that, "The original will of General Washington was preserved through the war, and is now on file, much mutilated, however, by frequent handling."

Surprisingly, many localities came through unscathed. R. M. Deterick, clerk of courts in Rappahannock County, noted that none of his records, "suffered any injury" as a result of the conflict. Franklin County clerk James J. Carter provided a brief rundown of what was in his office, without reference to the war or the loss of records: "Franklin County has sixteen volumes of records of wills, thirty of deeds; the earliest will is dated March 18, 1786 and the earliest deed is dated June 22d, 1785." The clerk from Alleghany County, John R. Pharr, also, without mentioning the war, noted the overall healthy state of the records: "From the formation of the county, March, 1822, and are continuous to the present time," all of which were "generally in a good condition." Floyd County clerk J. Godley replied that the records in his office were continuous from the establishment of the county and were all, "in a good state of preservation and the records legible," and James D. Clay, clerk for Halifax County, noted that both the deed and will books commenced from the establishment of the locality in 1752 and ran "continuous to the present time." After noting that Giles County was "organized on the 13th of May, 1806" with the "first court being held in a small log hut, near the site of the present courthouse," George W. Easley reported that court records, deeds and wills were "continuous to the present time," and that they were in "a tolerably fair state of preservation." The clerk for the relatively new Highland County, J. C. Matheny, reported that the four deed books and one will book were continuous from the founding of the county in 1847, and I. N. Fletcher from Fauquier County responded that the records of the county were continuous from its establishment in 1756 and all were "in a fair state of preservation." City of Petersburg clerk John



Fauquier County Court House, August 1862. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



Street scene in front of the Fauquier County Court House, August 1862. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

C. Armistead reported that there were, “No records or books other than those pertaining to the usual business, such as will, deed, and execution books,” and, “nothing that the State has any interest in further than the preservation of all court records for the benefit of the local public.”

Lancaster County clerk Warren Eubank provided a simple and practical assessment of the records: “The subjects of record relate principally to the ordinary business of the courts, such as orders granting administration on estates, admitting wills to probate, appointing guardians, recordation of deeds, wills, fiduciary accounts, &c.; many of the orders of the courts, in the early days of the county, relate to local matters, such as the register of the birth of slaves, the marks of cattle, hogs, sheep, &c.; all the records are in a good state of preservation, except the damages caused by the worms; the records date back to 1652, and are continuous to the present time.” While the Lancaster County records appeared to fare well, the clerk noted that there were “no weapons, flags, nor portraits, maps, weights nor measures; every thing of the kind remaining ... was taken possession of and carried off by the Federal troops in 1863.”

One of the rare lengthy responses was from Madison County clerk T. A. Hill, who appeared to take the survey seriously. Hill noted that the records included “proceedings of courts, wills, deeds, and settlements of fiduciaries, &c.,” that they were continuous from the founding of the locality in 1792 to the present, and that they were all in a “fair state of preservation,” with the older volumes having recently been rebound. The clerk then provided historical information regarding a local church, descriptions of the seals for the county court, the circuit superior court of law and chancery and

the circuit court, and then transcriptions of some records, including an attorney’s oath and regulated ordinary rates.

The lengthiest response was from City of Richmond clerk Andrew Jinks, who offered a bulleted response to the questionnaire, beginning with an explanation of the establishment of the city and a brief history of the courts, followed by a brief survey of the records, mentioning that he had in his office “all land books of real estate of the city of Richmond, returns of delinquent lands; all ordinary and tavern licenses ... granted in this Court; qualifications of all public officers; registration books, record of all marriage licenses, indentures of apprenticeship, returns of all judgments rendered by justices of the peace, and the record of births and deaths.” Other items covered included “a life size portrait of John Marshall,” maps recorded and filed in the chancery court, weights and measures (none) and the city of Richmond Hustings Court seal.

In some instances, the clerks appeared not to have understood the assignment. L. Scruggs, clerk for Pittsylvania County, went into great detail describing the “seals of the courts,” but made no mention of the run of court records or their condition. Page County clerk J. W. Watson, also possibly not understanding the purpose of the questionnaire, replied that he “had nothing to report.” Greene County clerk W.S. Lewis sent in a list of publications, including Henning’s Statutes and copies of the Acts of Assembly, along with information about the seals.

Some of the respondents went off into rambling replies in which they seemed to tout one or more of their more prestigious manuscripts or artifacts, such as with H.P. Cochran, clerk for the City of Charlottesville, whose response focused on the “will of Thaddeus Kosciusko (whose fall made freedom shriek)” which was in the circuit court clerk’s office. “As the United States government is trying to get possession of it, I suggest that the State of Virginia make an endeavor to obtain possession of it and hand it in the Library for the gratification of the curious.”

Another somewhat lengthy response (comparatively speaking) came from Clodomir Burton of Henrico County, who supplied a brief survey of the records and their condition: “There are several very old books in the office, running back to about 1680” and “court orders, wills, deeds, &c.,” were “generally in a remarkable state of preservation, and the writing perfectly legible.” As with other clerks, Burton went on to highlight certain records, including a manuscript “announcing the doctrine of ‘Transubstantiation’” that had been filed among the deeds of “W. Byrd, of Westover, Charles City county, to Francis West, dated 14th March, 1741,” conveying land in Richmond, “lately laid off in the county of Henrico,” then transcribed a blurb on the back of the deed by Byrd.

Because of the poor response to the questionnaire, it was hoped that, in the future, the representatives would “impress upon the minds of their county clerks the importance of making full and satisfactory reports, and thus properly carry out the spirit of the resolution.” ■

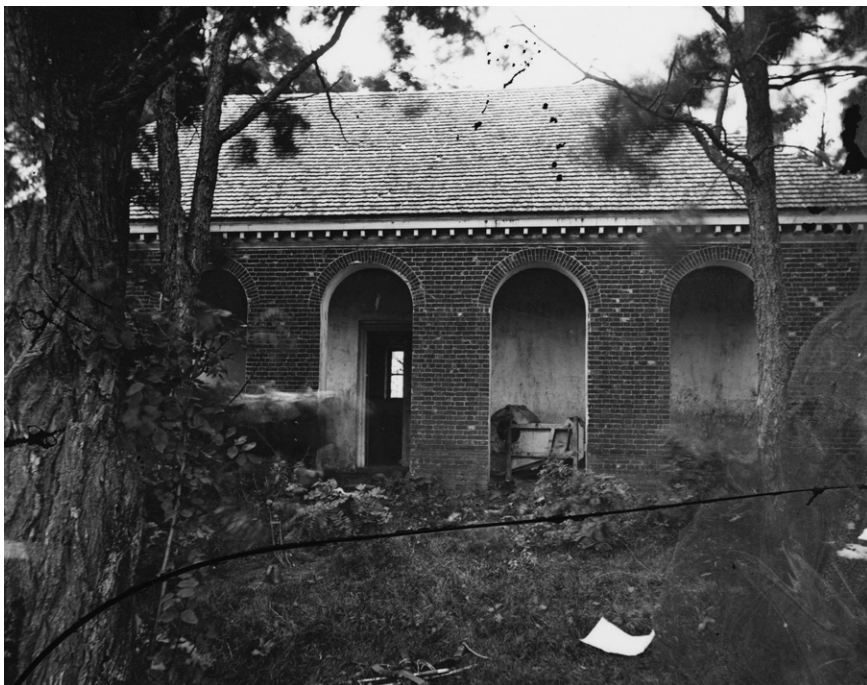


Petersburg Court House, June 1864–April 1865. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

1865 Inspection of the Charles City County Clerk's Office

Since its days as a colony, the government of the Commonwealth of Virginia has required (or encouraged) annual inspections of the records in clerks' offices to ensure their condition and accessibility. When they survive, these surveys provide a snapshot of a clerk's office at a moment in time, which can be helpful today to the archivists from the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program. This 1865 Charles City County inspection report chronicles the difficulties of the clerk's office during the Civil War. As far as

photographs go, the Charles City County Courthouse is probably the most well-documented Civil War-era courthouse in Virginia. The accompanying photographs from the Civil War Collection at the Library of Congress were all taken by Timothy H. O'Sullivan in June 1864. The inspection report was pulled from Charles City County Circuit Court, Court Records/Common Law Papers, Drawer 5, 1860–1867, Box 5, Local Government Records Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. ■



To the Hon. Joseph Christian Judge of the Circuit Court
of Charles City County.

The undersigned a committee appointed by your Honor at the last term of the Court, to examine the office of the Clerk of the said Court, have performed that duty, and now respectfully submit to your Honor the result of their examination.

The committee first directed their attention to such of the Books and papers of the office as have been preserved from the ravages of the late war. They found the loss in books and papers very heavy, which is to be deeply regretted: of all the books and papers of the office when the war commenced, only three books have been saved, one Chancery order Book, one Common Law order Book much damaged, and one fee Book: There are no Court papers prior to the year 1844, and but few for the years 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62 & 63. There are none for 46, 50, 52 & 53: All the papers that have been saved from 44 to 63 inclusive have been neatly put up in bundles and deposited in their proper place in the office. The committee will now state to your Honor what disposition was made of the books and papers of the office during the war, to the end that they might be saved if possible, and also the time and place when and where they were destroyed: They deem it proper to do so, as an act of justice to the Clerk, to whose care they had been committed: in the spring of eighteen hundred and sixty two, and about the time of the advance of Genl. McClellan's army, the Clerk boxed up the papers and books of the County and Circuit Court offices, and removed them to the house of Mr. Thomas Stagg a worthy citizen of this County, where they remained until the fall of that year, after the retreat of Mr. McClellan's army he carried them to his own residence, where they remained until the spring of 1863, at which time he carried them to the residence of Thomas J. Binns another worthy citizen of this County, where they remained without loss or damage until January 1864, at which time the County Court made an order for the Books and papers of their office to be removed by their Clerk to the City of Richmond, and your Predecessor directed his Clerk on different occasions to take the same care of the books and papers of his office as was taken of those of the County Court. The Clerk promptly obeyed orders by removing the books and papers of the two offices to the City of Richmond, and deposited them in the State Capitol, where they remained

without interruption until July 4, 1865, when they were destroyed as is supposed by some portion of the Federal army: The committee are satisfied that the whole course of the Clerk in regard to the Books and papers of the two offices received the unqualified approbation of the Circuit Judge and the County Justices.

The foregoing statement of facts is considered by the committee an ample vindication of the fidelity of the Clerk and evidence of his sound discretion.

The committee next proceeded to examine the books and papers of the office in use, since the reorganization of the State Government: They found a full set of Books, to wit 1. Chancery Order Book, 1. Common Law Order Book, 1. Will Book, 1. Execution Book, 1. Fee Book, 1. Chancery Process Book, 1. Common Law Process Book, 1. Chancery Rule Book, and 1. Common Law Rule Book. These books are all fully up to the date of this report and indexed, they were examined very carefully by the committee, and found in all respects entirely satisfactory, and on every page, exhibit unmistakable evidence of care, neatness, accuracy, and official fidelity: The Court papers were found well arranged, and well cared for.

The committee found a scarcity of stationery in the office, the following articles are needed 1. Ream of papers, 1. Quart of ink, 1 small bottle of red ink, 1 do. Glue, 4 packs small envelopes, 2 do. large size, and office blanks, they recommend an allowance of Ten dollars which in their opinion will be sufficient for the purpose.

All of which is most respectfully reported

Nov. 16, 1865

By your Committee

J. H. Willcox

Isaac H. Christian
James M. Wilcox

To the Hon. Joseph Christian Judge of the Circuit Court of Charles City County.

The undersigned a committee appointed by your Honor at the last term of the Court, to examine the office of the Clerk of the said court, have performed that duty, and now respectfully submit to your Honor the results of their examination.

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Nov. 16, 1865

By your Committee

J. H. Willcox

Isaac H. Christian

James M. Wilcox

Another Summer Season on the Road for Consulting Archivists

For anyone who loves Virginia history and old stuff (like archives), few jobs could be more desirable than that of a CCRP consulting archivist. In their roles, current consulting archivists Tracy Harter and Eddie Woodward travel from one end of the Commonwealth of Virginia to the other, assisting circuit court clerks with the conservation of their court records, some of which date to the 1630s. On their visits to the clerks' offices, it is not uncommon for them to advise on processing, environmental, security, storage and other issues related to records preservation. However, when they are in the field, more often than not they are assisting clerks with issues related to the CCRP grants program.

The CCRP program offers grants to circuit court clerks for item conservation, essential equipment and storage, reformatting, and security systems. Of these, the item conservation grant is the most popular. To apply for an item conservation grant, the clerk and/or staff, often with the assistance of a CCRP consulting archivist, must identify items that might be considered the best candidates for conservation. Generally speaking, the items considered are either bound volumes, loose records or plats. Once an item has been selected, the CCRP consulting archivist will examine it and create a condition report, noting the page/item count and the condition of the record, be it bound or loose. While onsite, the consulting archivist takes photographs of the items, making sure to document the issues that make them good candidates for conservation. When consulting archivists travel to clerks' offices, they usually try to write up condition reports for as many items as time allows. In this way, they are able to create a backlog of items for each locality, so that with the announcement of an upcoming grant cycle, each locality has several potential grant candidates, with hopefully enough to also get through another grant cycle or two.

After returning to the Library of Virginia, working from the condition report, the consulting archivist writes up a statement of work (or SOW) for each item, providing a condition summary and outlining the treatment requirements for the item. Those SOWs, along with the photographs of each item, will then be filed electronically.

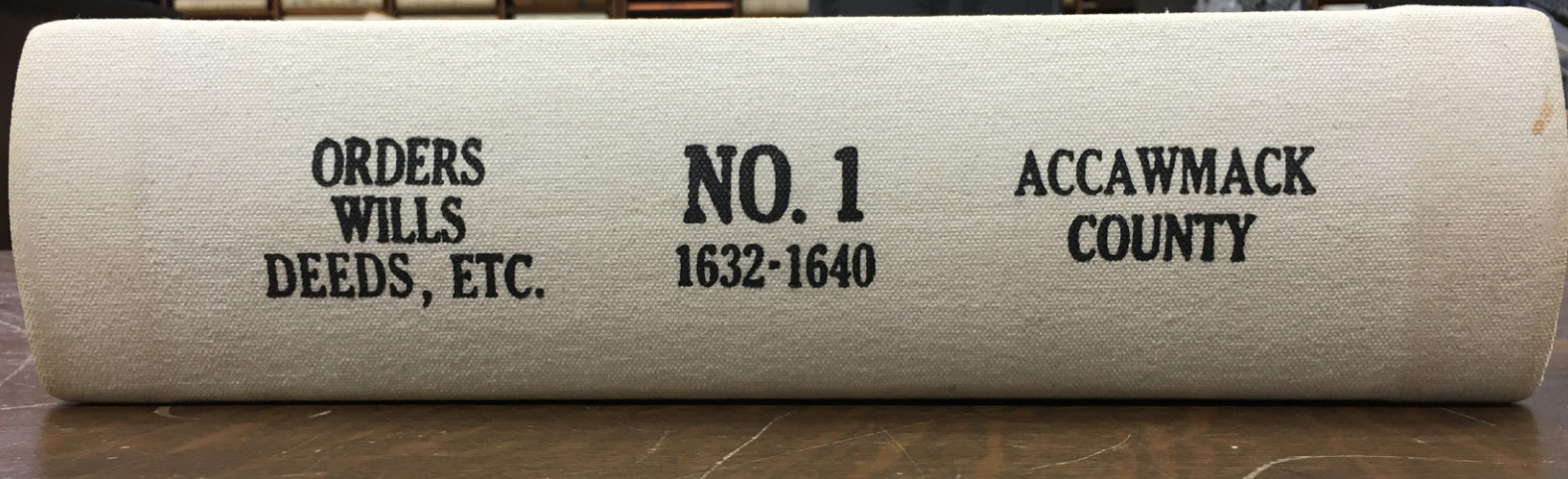
After the grant cycle opening is announced, unless instructed otherwise by the clerk, the consulting archivist sends a list of recommended

1 - The circuit court clerk's office at the Powhatan County Courthouse was the first clerk's office that newly minted CCRP consulting archivists Tracy Harter and Eddie Woodward visited on June 15, 2016.

2 - Botetourt County Circuit Court Clerk Tommy Moore, Malfourd "Bo" Trumbo, chair of the Library of Virginia Board, and CCRP consulting archivist Tracy Harter discuss a reproduction of the 1821 John Wood map of Botetourt County in Fincastle on May 7, 2025.

3 - CCRP consulting archivist Eddie Woodward conducts an inventory of the Louisa County Courthouse basement on Sept. 12, 2017.





“Accawmack County Orders, Wills, Deeds, Etc., No. 1, 1632-1640” is the oldest record book held in any circuit court clerk’s office in Virginia. Because of the overlapping histories of the two counties, it is in the Northampton County circuit court clerk’s office where this photograph was taken on Jan. 18, 2018. Library of Virginia records indicate that

it was sent to conservator William J. Barrow in 1934, where it was laminated (likely some form of silking), and in 1998 the Northampton County circuit court clerk was awarded a CCRP item conservation grant (1998B-19) to have the volume delaminated and conserved by the Marotti Conservation Laboratory.



Generally speaking, the items most often considered for CCRP conservation grants are bound volumes (either sewn or post bound), loose records (bundled or flat filed), and plats (loose, hanging, or bound). The top row, bound volumes (left to right): “City of Fredericksburg Hustings Court Order Book A, 1782-1785” (Nov. 29, 2023); “Middlesex County Minute Book, 1823-1827” (April 8, 2024); “King George County Wills No. 2, 1780-1804” (May 11, 2022). Middle row loose records (left to

right): “Campbell County Marriages, 1854-1858” (Dec. 18, 2018); “Floyd County Deeds, 1831-1842” (Nov. 30, 2018); City of Alexandria Chancery Corporation Court and Circuit Court records (July 28, 2020). Bottom row plats (left to right): “New Kent County Plats and Maps, 1831-1840” (January 25, 2022); “City of Danville Plats, Plat Books 1-8” (April 5, 2018); “York County Plat Book 1, circa 1850s-1940s” (Aug. 31, 2016).

candidates most in need of conservation to the clerks' offices, along with the SOWs for each of those items. If that list is satisfactory to the clerk, those SOWs will be used by the conservation vendors to provide a quote for the conservation treatment that is outlined in the SOW. Once the conservation vendor representative has made an onsite visit to the clerk's office to evaluate the items, the vendor compiles a proposal of work (POW), adhering to the "treatment requirements" in the SOW, and submits it to the clerk. The clerk uses that quote as the amount of funding requested in the item conservation grant application.

Not long after the grant cycle is announced, the consulting archivists begin receiving and processing the grant applications, ensuring that the numbers on all of the paperwork add up correctly and everything is in order before the grant application is entered into the grants database. The applications are accepted and processed up until the deadline, after which the members of the grant review board (consisting of three clerks and two Library of Virginia staff) take several weeks to review the grants prior to their meeting to award the grants in early spring. It is during this grant evaluation process that the grant review board members have access to the photographs taken by the consulting archivists when they were examining the items, in order to assist them with their determinations

as to whether they are awarded the funding for that particular item or not. At the conclusion of the grant cycle and after the grants have been awarded, the consulting archivist must make sure that the documentation associated with any items not awarded funding in the item conservation grant are returned to the queue for the following grant cycle.

Additionally, every few months throughout the course of the year, including during the summer travel season, the consulting archivists visit the conservation labs in Greensboro, North Carolina, to inspect items that were treated as part of an item conservation grant award. Once the treatment of the items has been approved by the archivists, the vendor returns them to the clerks' offices, where the clerk also inspects them and signs off on a verification of work form, which initiates the disbursement of the grant award to the clerk's fiscal office to reimburse the locality for the cost of the conservation treatment.

In the meantime, the consulting archivists then count the number of items in the queue, which forecasts their summer travel arrangements before the new travel season begins, and the entire process outlined above is repeated. ■



Above: Some of the 16 localities ready for inspection by CCRP consulting archivists at the Kofile Technologies facility in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Aug. 9, 2022.



CCRP consulting archivist Tracy Harter inspects the collation of consents and affidavits in "Warren County Marriage Records, 1883-1884," at the ECS Conservation/HF Group conservation lab in Greensboro, North Carolina, on Feb. 11, 2026.

Below right: This photograph is from the CCRP Grant Review Board meeting at the Library of Virginia on Feb. 13, 2024, where they considered 124 grant applications submitted from 101 localities.

In the photograph are (left to right): Leslie Courtois, Library of Virginia conservator; Mark A. "Bo" Taylor, Scott County circuit court clerk; Greg Crawford, Library of Virginia State Archivist and director of Government Records Services (and *de facto* CCRP program manager); Tracy Harter, Library of Virginia CCRP consulting archivist; Kathy Jordan, Library of Virginia director of Digital Initiatives and Web Presence; Vince Brooks, Library of Virginia Local Records program manager; Chaz W. Haywood, Rockingham County circuit court clerk; and Leeta D. Louk, Madison County circuit court clerk (who was observing before she rotated onto the committee the next year). Also participating virtually was Richard L. "Rick" Francis, Southampton County circuit court clerk.



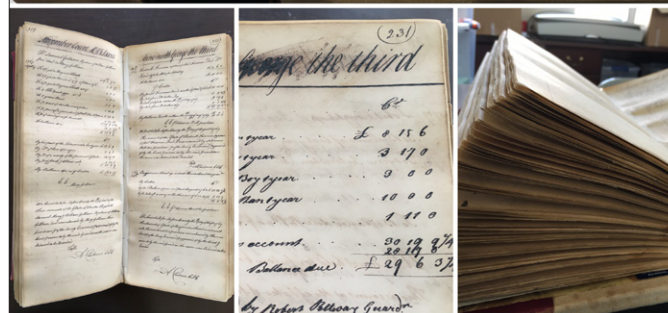
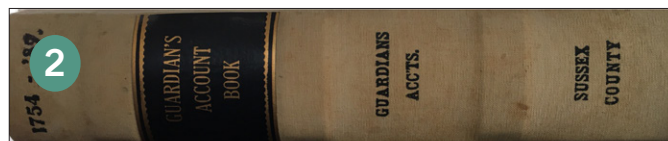
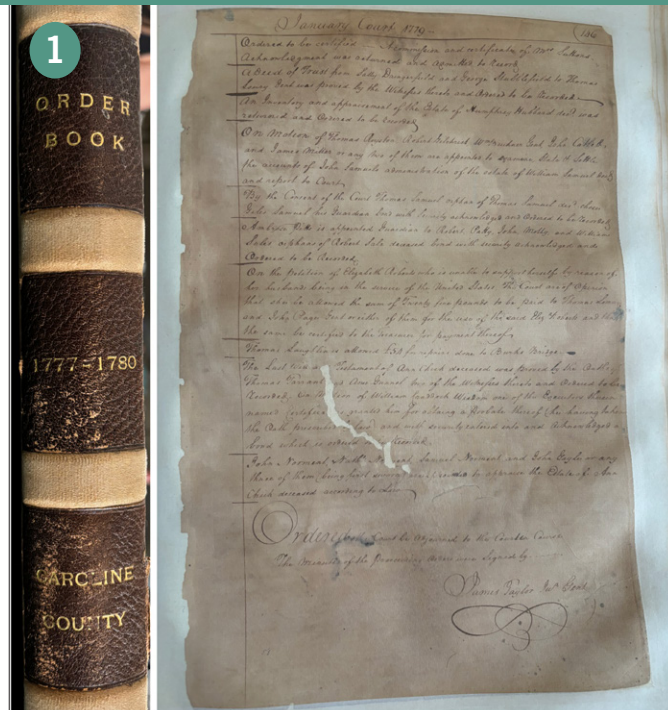
Full Conservation Treatment? Not So Fast My Friend

Some circuit court clerks' records rooms are loaded with records that succumbed to ill-fated conservation methods of the past. These treatments, which were applied with the best intentions, were later determined to be damaging to the records. As a result, a lot of time, effort and money has been put into trying to undo these unfortunately common conservation methods. Many of today's CCRP item conservation grants are awarded to fix these items.

The history of document conservation can be broken down into a few categories, beginning with what we might deem to have been the era of functional repair. Typically, these efforts centered around rebinding. In other words, when a worn-out volume's binding broke down or pages and signatures came loose, the book was sent to a bindery where it was either repaired or rebound. We have also seen what appears to be primitive document or page mending for structural repairs, which typically looks like sheets or sections of paper custom cut to cover a tear or loss and glued over that section of the page, and in some instances, we have seen pages hand stitched to bridge tears.

In the 1890s, lamination took hold, first with silking, which became a popular, albeit expensive form of document conservation, which was then supplanted in the 1930s by the more affordable cellulose acetate lamination which lasted until the late 1980s. Both of these forms of lamination, along with the rarer, modern lamination, remain a huge problem in courthouses today. With the advent of photocopy machines in the 1960s, there was a trend in tape stripping, in which the pages were cut out at the gutter with each single page taped to a strip of record paper formatted for a post binder. This form of "conservation" made the single pages easier to remove for photocopying, but completely disemboweled the original sewn binding of the volume.

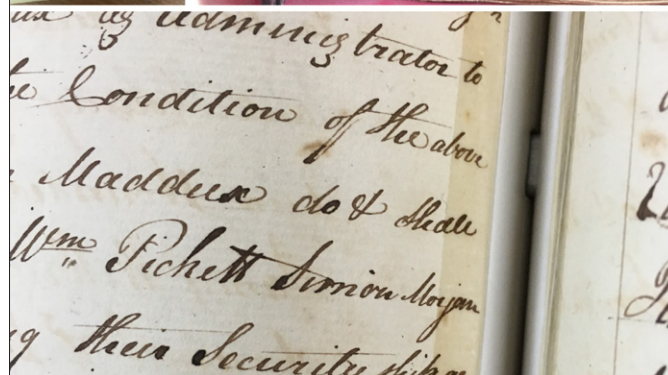
These caustic forms of conservation treatment continued until the late 1960s, when the concept of reversibility became a core tenet of document conservation. Not surprisingly, it emerged as a formal ethical standard to combat the damaging, permanent and often irreversible repairs such as those outlined above. The concept of reversibility ensures that treatments can "easily" be undone if needed, especially if improved conservation techniques become available. This new conservation philosophy essentially translates into "Do no harm" and suggests that any conservation treatment should be applied with a minimalist approach. By these standards, all mending and adhesives should be water soluble and should be easily removable. In theory, by these standards, encapsulation of documents (in archival quality polyester sleeves) would be another minimalist



1 - "Caroline County Order Book, 1777-1780" was treated using the Emery silk process in 1929. The volume was stored at the Central Rappahannock Heritage Center in Fredericksburg, where it was examined on June 11, 2024 and has since been conserved and returned to the Caroline County circuit court clerk's office.

2 - "Sussex County Guardians' Accounts, 1754-1789" was cellulose acetate laminated in 1939. The volume was examined in the Sussex County circuit court clerk's office archival storage area on March 22, 2022.

3 - "Fauquier County Deed Book 17, 1807-1810" part 1 was stripped with tape (on both sides of the pages) probably sometime in the 1960s. The volume was examined in the Fauquier County circuit court clerk's office records room on Oct. 7, 2016.



approach to document conservation. However, it depends on how we get there.

For obvious reasons, loose records are pretty good candidates for encapsulation. The documents are enveloped between two sheets of clear polyester film and, possibly with the exception of “reversible” mending, the documents are unaltered in any way. Unaltered is key. But, what about when a volume is disbound with the intent of encapsulating the pages? Disbinding a sewn-bound book to encapsulate the pages goes against the primary conservation notion of reversibility or “Do no harm.”

In the 1970s, modern conservation standards began to trend toward (or back to) conservation rebinding, recognizing the fact that the original binding structures are essential to understanding not only a book’s physical and social history but also its own value as a historical artifact. Plainly put, do not cut (or guillotine) the pages out of a book unless it is absolutely necessary, because the disbinding of a volume is an irreversible action.

Sometimes, if a volume has brittle pages that are at risk from shredding or crumbling during handling, but the book itself has artifactual value, conservators might opt for custom-fitted, archival-quality boxes to house the book, boards, spine and all. However, if the volume has fragile or brittle pages and the binding is in poor physical condition with no essential artifactual value, it might be a good candidate for full conservation treatment (or deacidification, encapsulation and post binding). The encapsulated sleeves provide support and protection for the brittle pages. Additionally, if the pages were already cut from the volume to implement one of the above-mentioned ill-fated conservation attempts, such as lamination or tape stripping, the book has already been irreversibly altered.

But cutting the pages out of a book should never be taken lightly. Not only does cutting the pages out of a book forever alter the volume, but there can often be other adverse effects. Encapsulating every page significantly increases the bulkiness and weight of a volume, more often than not, turning single volumes into multiple post-bound parts. When this happens, the volume that the clerk’s office sent out for treatment returns in two or more volumes. Additionally, large volumes such as land tax and property tax books frequently return so much thicker and heavier as to make them impossible to work with or even move.

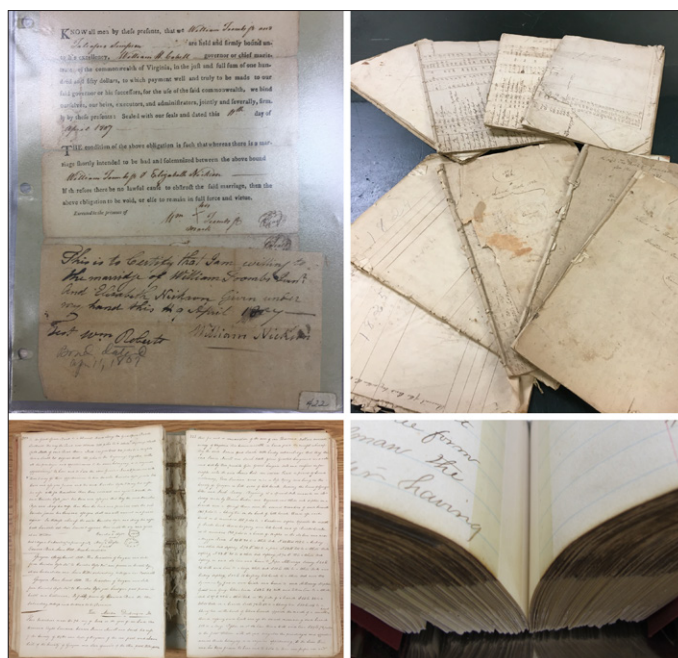
Unfortunately, because full conservation treatment is a fairly simple assembly line process, even with all of its downsides, conservation labs encouraged clerks’ offices to adopt this method, undoubtedly even when it was not necessary; conservation labs were promoting the treatment according to their skillset instead of what was in the best interest of the book. And as stated, when this happens, the informational value is retained, but all artifactual value is irretrievably lost. Walk into any circuit court clerk’s office records room and you will see dozens and dozens of court record books in their distinctive post binder. Full conservation treatment should be a last resort, not a first option. ■



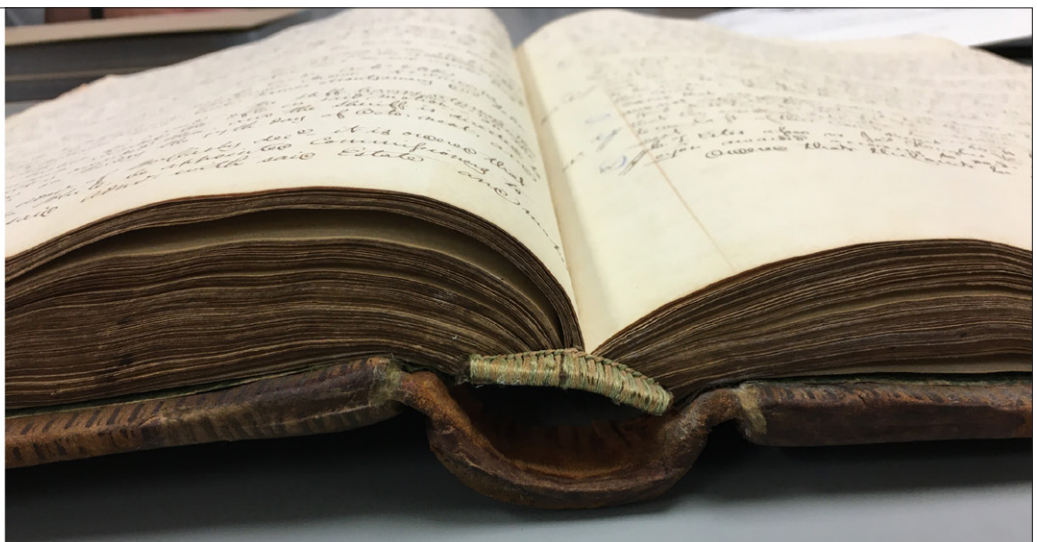
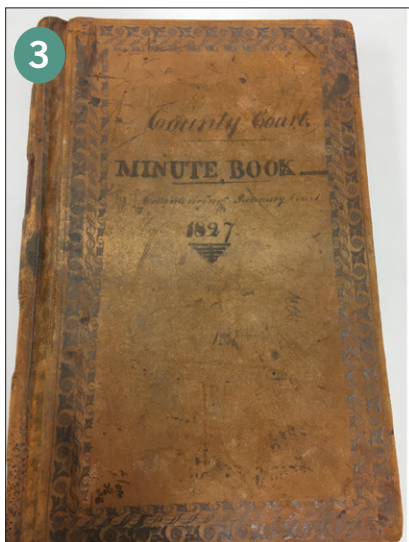
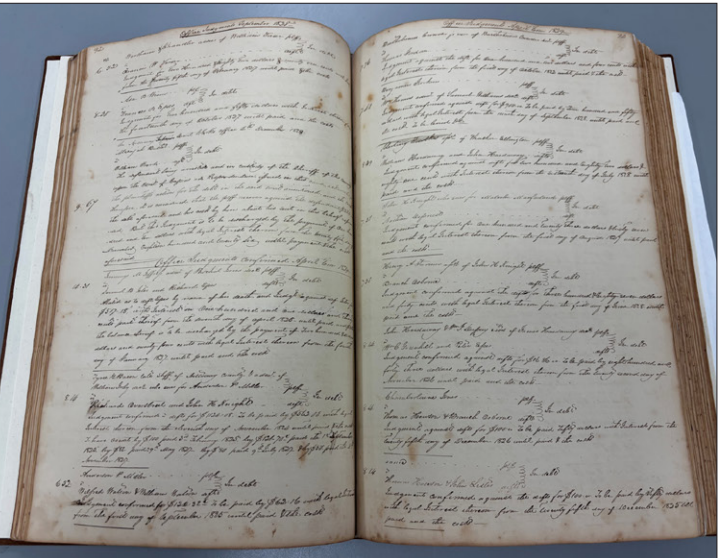
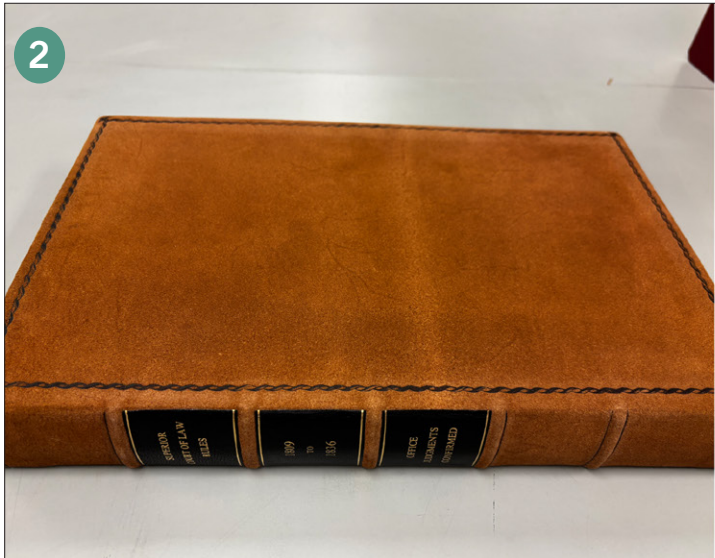
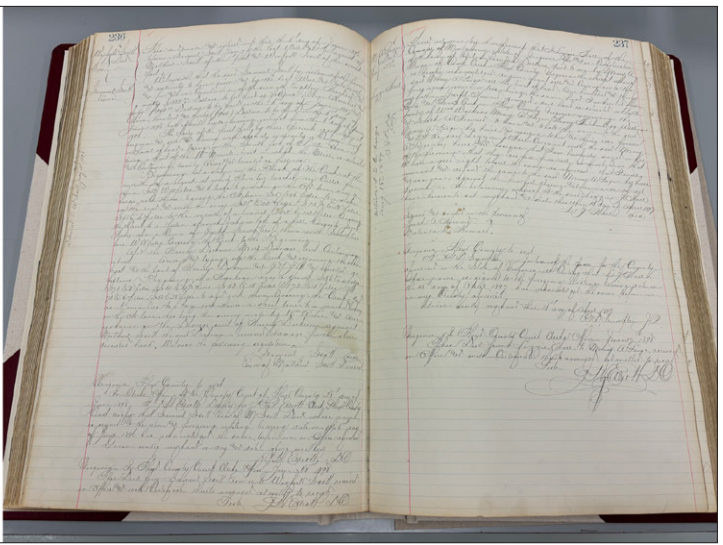
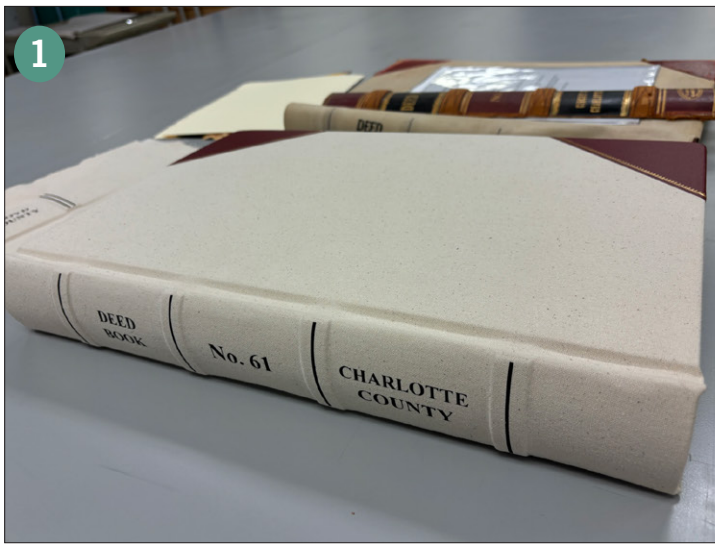
The first 50 or so volumes in the roller shelving in the Dinwiddie County circuit court clerk’s office on Aug. 18, 2016. At some time in the past the first 45 deed books received conservation treatment resulting in each volume being rebound (in post binders) in two parts.



Primitive document mending with custom cut paper patches glued over tears on pages in “Tazewell County Land Books, 1863-1870”. The volume was examined in the Tazewell County circuit court clerk’s office archival storage area on Sept. 12, 2019.



Loose records, items already detached from the binding of a book and small batches of records that can be combined are good candidates for full conservation treatment, such as these loose “Henry County Marriage Bonds, 1800-1808” (top left), loose “Goochland County Land Books, 1820-1829” (top right), tape stripped/post bound, “Augusta County Deed Book 86, 1870-1872” (lower right) and disbound “Grayson County Deed Book 1, 1793-1803” (lower left).

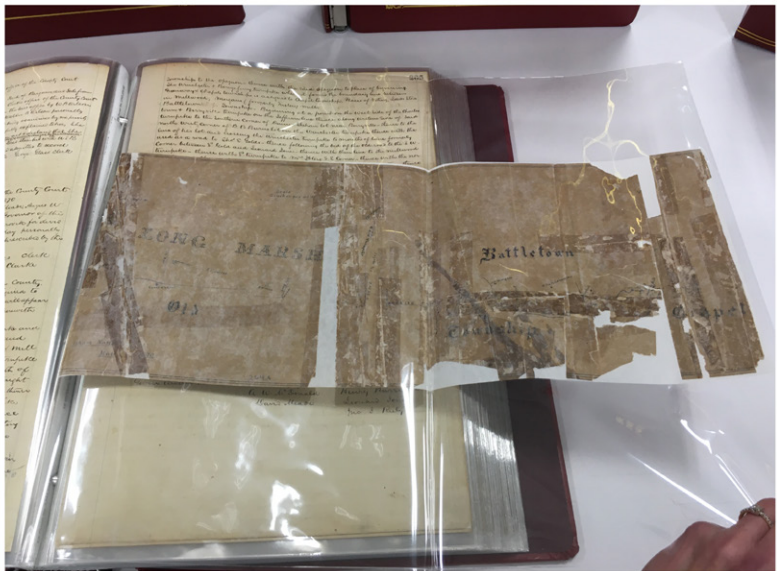
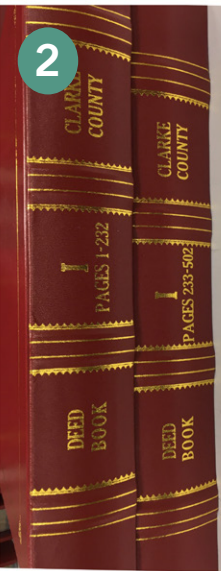
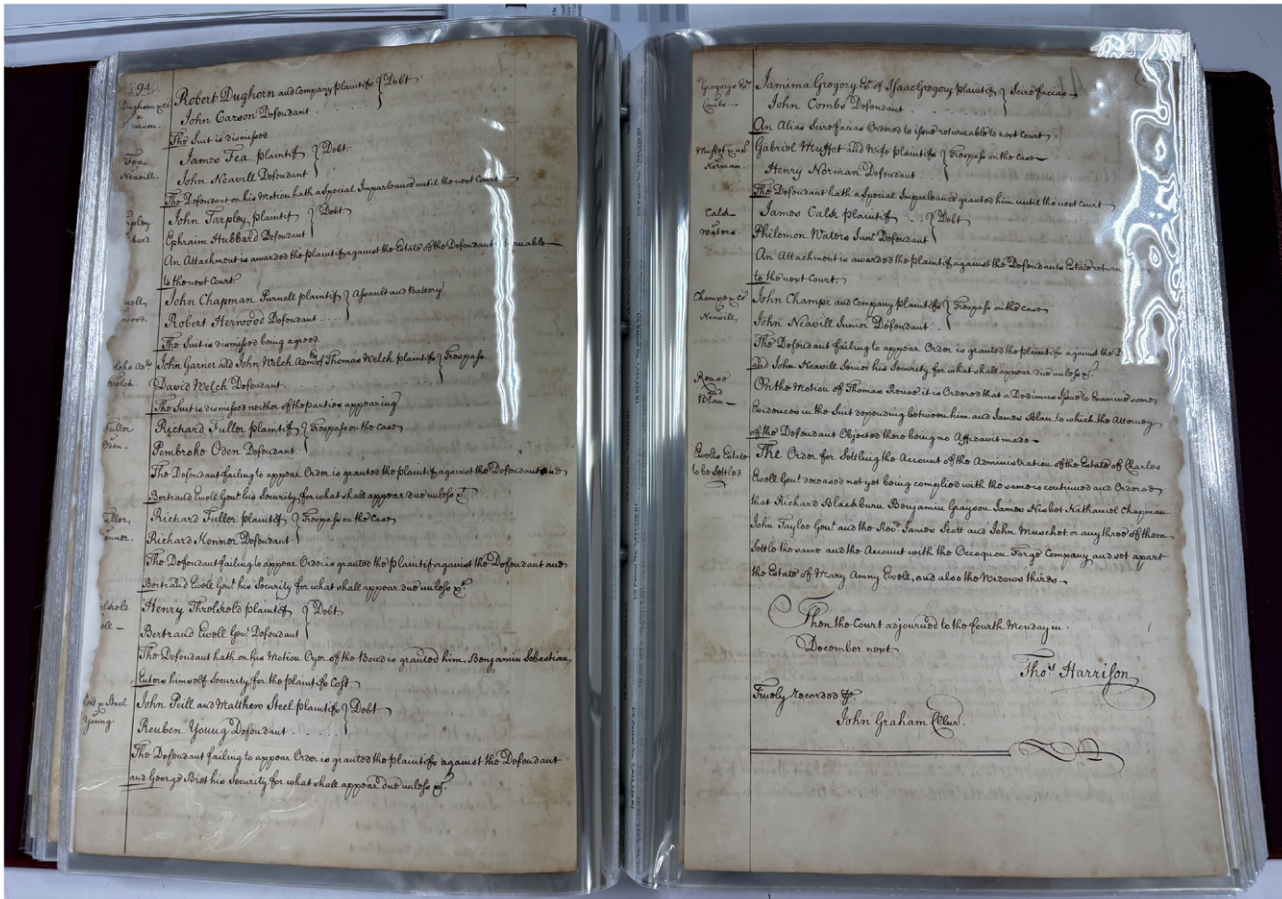
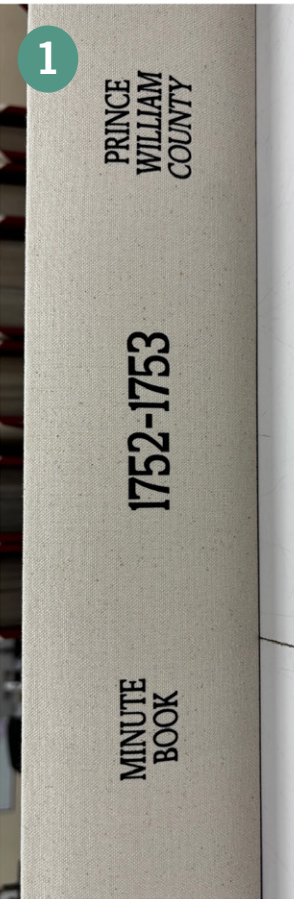


1 - "Charlotte County Deed Book No. 61, 1912" on Sept. 11, 2024, after being rebound at ECS Conservation/HF Group. The volume was examined in the Charlotte County circuit court clerk's office records room on May 10, 2023. Because it had detached pages, along with loose signatures and sewing, and because the binding had little historical or aesthetic value, it was determined to be a good candidate for standard hardback rebinding.

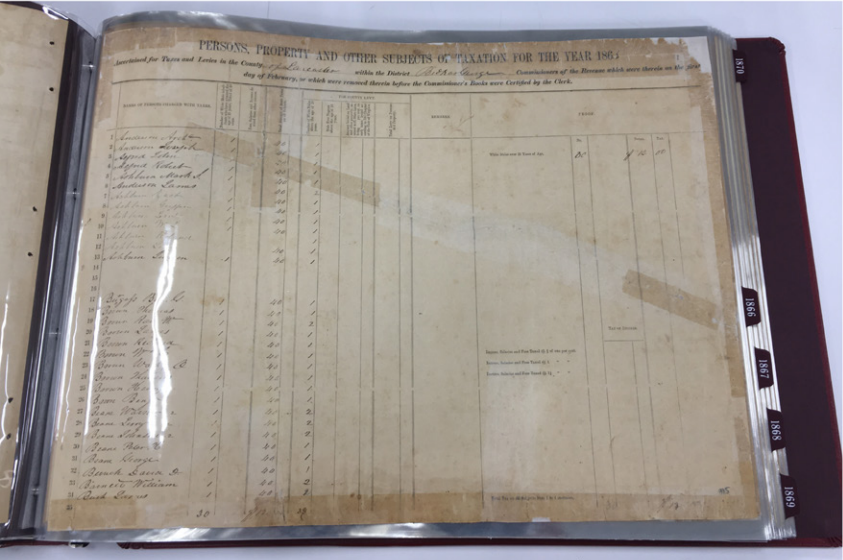
2 - "Nottoway County Superior Court of Law Rules, 1809-1836/Office Judgments Confirmed, 1809-1836" on Feb. 10, 2026, after being rebound at ECS Conservation/HF Group. The volume was examined in the Nottoway County circuit court clerk's office archival storage area on May 8, 2024. Because of its strong paper and solid text block, but worn and

deteriorating leather spine and boards with losses, it was determined to be a good candidate for a period rebinding, with tooling on the spine and covers similar to the original.

3 - "Nelson County Minute Book, 1827-1830" on June 27, 2024, after being rebound at ECS Conservation/HF Group. The volume was examined in the Nelson County circuit court clerk's office records room on July 27, 2022. With only loose hinges/joints, strong pages, and a solid text block, and the original unique stenciling and writing on the binding, it was determined to be a good candidate for restoration rebinding. Restoration rebinds retain as much of the original boards, spine components and titling information as possible, repairing and restoring as needed and replicating tooling where appropriate.



1 - "Prince William County Minute Book, 1752-1753" (also Executions 1752-1754) on Dec. 2, 2025, after being conserved at Kofile Technologies. The volume had been examined in the Prince William County circuit court clerk's office records room on May 9, 2023. Because it had been cellulose acetate laminated in 1944, it was considered a good candidate for full conservation treatment (deacidification, encapsulation and post binding).



2 - "Clarke County Deed Book I, 1868-1871" on Aug. 19, 2025, after being conserved at Kofile Technologies. Because it was stripped with tape (on one side of the page), it was considered a good candidate for full conservation treatment which resulted in the single volume being transformed into two parts. The volume was examined in the Clarke County circuit court clerk's office reading room on Aug. 20, 2021.

3 - "Lancaster County Land Book, 1859-1870" on May 19, 2022, after being conserved at Kofile Technologies. Because of their larger size, land tax and property tax books that receive full conservation treatment can be unusually problematic because the additional encapsulated sleeves add both weight and thickness to the volumes. The original volume, "Land Book 1850-1870," was examined in the Lancaster County circuit court clerk's office reading room on Feb. 20, 2020. Because the original volume was so large, totaling 540 pages, it was split into two parts when conserved.