



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Librarian of Virginia

Library of Virginia Receives \$150,000 Grant to Scan Augusta County Chancery Records

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The rich treasure trove of Augusta County's chancery cases is being digitized by the Library of Virginia over the next two years. The Library of Virginia has received a grant of \$150,000 from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to support the scanning of the Augusta County chancery records, one of the most significant collections of these records in the nation. The Augusta County chancery causes are comprised of case files from the Augusta County Circuit Court and cover the years 1745 to 1912. Cases are included from the Staunton Superior Court of Chancery, with a jurisdiction over 28 localities, from 1802 to 1831.

For the period from 1745 to 1770, the boundaries of Augusta County encompassed most of western Virginia and what became the states of West Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, and Ohio, and parts of present-day Pennsylvania as far north as Pittsburgh. The Augusta County chancery causes are the most voluminous of any locality in Virginia and are one of the longest and most complete continuous collections of chancery records of any locality in the country. The collection consists of 1,002 legal boxes and 18 oversize boxes and contains 10,437 individual cases.

"The digitization of the Augusta County chancery records will offer an invaluable resource for genealogists and local historians, K-12 teachers and students, and professional historians," said Librarian of Virginia Sandra G. Treadway. "These records are a gold mine of information particularly for those researching the history of the frontier, the history of industrial slavery, and the history of the Civil War. The Library is grateful to the NHPRC for recognizing the importance of the Library's grant proposal and for awarding the Library this grant to assist in scanning the Augusta County chancery cases."

"We are excited that our digitized historical chancery records will soon be available online through the Library of Virginia for researchers and historians throughout the world to view," said John B. Davis, Clerk of the Augusta County Circuit Court. "This combined effort of the Augusta County Clerk's Office and the Library of Virginia with support from both the Augusta County Historical Society and the Augusta County Genealogical Society will have the lasting impact of protecting the original record while making available a digitized copy for all researchers to use. When this project is complete, Augusta County will be one of the few counties in Virginia to have all of its historic deed, will, and chancery records digitized and safeguarded for use by future generations. Best of all, funding for this project was provided through a combination of a federal grant and fees collected by the Circuit Court Clerks' Records Preservation Project at no cost to county taxpayers."

A chancery cause is one that could not be decided readily by existing written laws. Since chancery cases dealt with issues of equity rather than law, they often contain lengthy depositions, similar to oral histories, and can also hold other valuable materials in the form of exhibits submitted to the court. It is not uncommon to find land plats, correspondence, wills, publications, photographs, architectural drawings, and the like as exhibits.

This project will provide free online access to all pre-1913 Augusta County chancery causes. The Chancery Records Index is available through the Library's Virginia Memory Web portal (www.virginiamemory.com). Currently, more than five million images from 48 localities can be searched

through the index. The scanning project will begin in February 2011 and be complete on January 31, 2013.

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About the Library of Virginia: The Library of Virginia is the official repository for the Commonwealth's archival records. The Library of Virginia, located at 800 East Broad Street in historic downtown Richmond, holds the world's most extensive collection of material about the Old Dominion and has been a steward of the commonwealth's documentary and printed heritage since 1823. At the Library of Virginia the story of Virginia is told through nearly 113 million manuscripts and nearly 1.9 million books, serials, bound periodicals, microfilm reels, newspapers, and state and federal documents.

About the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program: Since 1990 the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program (www.lva.virginia.gov/agencies/CCRP/) has been charged with preserving and providing access to the historical records of Virginia's 120 circuit courts. The CCRP is funded by a portion of all clerks' recordation fees. Collected funds are administered by the Library, and the CCRP program works closely with the circuit court clerks to award grants to assist clerks in addressing the records preservation needs in their offices. Since its inception, the program has made nearly 1,000 preservation grants in excess of \$14 million to clerks throughout the commonwealth. The CCRP also provides resources needed to process and house the circuit court records that are transferred to the State Archives for safekeeping and increased access, as well as to track, duplicate, and maintain circuit court microfilm stored at the Library of Virginia.

Editor's Advisory: Images from the Augusta County Chancery Records are available upon request. Jan.Hathcock@lva.virginia.gov, 804-692-3592