

HOW to RESEARCH



Your HISTORIC VIRGINIA PROPERTY



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HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR HISTORIC VIRGINIA PROPERTY

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A Publication of the
Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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INTRODUCTION

Owners of old Virginia houses, commercial buildings, mills, and farmsteads, and historians of churches, schools, businesses, and industries often want to learn more about the history of their property but are not sure how to go about it. Some are content just to satisfy their curiosity, while others hope to get the property listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The National Park Service publication titled *National Register Bulletin 39: Researching a Historic Property* is an excellent general guide to some basic sources and techniques of research. The purpose of *How to Research Your Historic Virginia Property* is to introduce you to some of the useful sources available for learning about the history of a Virginia property, whether or not you intend to nominate it for the registers.

Since its inception in 1966, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) has been compiling information about the old and new, historic and non-historic resources of Virginia. If you own a house or other type of historic building, DHR may have records concerning it. The file may not answer every question, but it might help you get started down the right research track. For more information, contact the Virginia Department of Historic Resources archives at (804) 482-6102.

If you would like to learn more about the register programs, please go to DHR's webpage for the Historic Registers program, <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/register.htm>, for information on how the programs got started, the criteria for eligibility, and the procedures for listing qualifying resources.

ONLINE AND PHYSICAL RECORDS

Before plunging into archival records and manuscripts, look first to the Internet. Conduct general searches on the history of your area and keyword searches for historic names associated with your property. For best results, search both for websites and for images. The amount of information available on the Internet grows exponentially month by month. You may be surprised to discover how much information

you need is readily available. Keep in mind, however, that some websites are more trustworthy than others. Evaluate the information you find with a critical eye and, whenever possible, crosscheck it against other sources of information such as those described herein.

After searching the Internet, you also will want to check physical records available at local and state repositories as many historic records have not yet been digitized. Many libraries and historical societies have websites that include information about their collections and contact information for assistance. In their physical holdings, historical societies often have published books on old buildings in particular counties and cities. Local histories may mention the owners of your property or historical events that took place there. Books on architectural styles can help you estimate your building's date of construction, and many books have been published on historic decoration and furnishings. Before making a trip to the historical society, checking their website is a good first step to make sure the trip is worthwhile.

There are three major state repositories in Richmond that warrant consultation. DHR maintains a reference library that is open to the public during business hours (8:30 am - 4:45 pm, Tuesday-Thursday). The Library of Virginia (800 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA; 9:00 am - 5 pm, Monday-Saturday) and the Virginia Historical Society's research library (428 North Boulevard, Richmond, VA; 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Monday - Saturday) may offer additional reference materials. Many of the materials at these repositories have not yet been digitized and the only way to access them is in person. Please remember that research on your property can not be considered complete if you are checking only online sources.

THINKING ABOUT THE PAST

The questions one can ask about the history of a historic resource seem endless. This publication will help you find the answers by directing you to the most likely sources. It may be helpful to organize your thoughts about the past before looking for the answers. When researching a building, in particular, the following are some typical questions asked.

About the building: When was it constructed and for whom? Was it built in stages, or all at the same time? What was on the site before it was built? What is its architectural style, and what period of construction might the style suggest? Who was the architect or contractor? What changes have occurred to the building since it was first constructed? What other buildings have stood there?

About its owners: Who has owned it since it was built? What was interesting or significant about his or her life and career? If the building was owned by a congregation or organization, who were the members? For a commercial or industrial property, is there any information about the enterprises that operated here?

About its history: What happened here? What led up to each event? What were its consequences? How does the history of this property relate to larger events or historical trends?

You may not be able to answer all these questions, but books and records exist to help you answer many of them. This guidebook will describe many of the sources that provide the answers. Along the way, you will encounter historians, archivists, and librarians who will help you. If your search becomes more specialized—if you want to learn about a particular Civil War battle that happened nearby, for instance—they can guide you to the specific sources that have the answers.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

This section repeats the basic research questions asked earlier. Each question is followed by a list of sources in which you might find the answers. The sources most likely to provide the answers are listed first. In the next section, entitled "The Sources," each type of record is listed in alphabetical order and discussed in detail. Remember that you usually do not need to look at every source in order to find the answer to a question. You may come up with additional questions in the course of your research, however, that will prompt you to consult some of the other sources on the list.

One of the first things you should do is place your property in the context of its surroundings—think broadly, not narrowly. Your property has been part of a neighborhood or community for a long time. Some



Haines Chapel, circa 1914, and Cemetery, Rockbridge Co.

things about its surroundings have changed (neighbors, nearby buildings) while others have remained constant (rivers and creeks, roads, land forms, area landmarks). You will learn much more about your resource and its many owners and occupants if you keep the bigger picture in mind and gather information about the surrounding area as well.

Look at a detailed map of your area. If it is rural, check to see if there is a watercourse or named natural feature, such as a hill, near your property. Is there a well-known landmark, such as an old church or plantation, nearby? Is your property located on an old road or street? If your property is in an urban or suburban area, notice the street patterns and the land uses nearby—are you in a commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed use area? The more you know about your neighboring landmarks—both natural and manmade—the easier it will be for you to keep track of your property through time.

Generate a list of names and subjects as you proceed to use for key word searches on computer databases, the Internet, and in book indexes. Add to and subtract from this list as you continue with your research areas.

When trying to establish a building's construction date or original owner, work from the known to the unknown, from the present to the past. Use local histories and the city or county land tax books to trace the property back to the first owner. Use the deeds and other records noted below to verify and supplement what the land tax books tell you. For twentieth-century resourc-

es, local tax assessor's records often include a construction date. In an urban area, building permit files also may provide relevant information. Sometimes, even after copious research, the date of construction cannot be determined from documents. This is especially true of colonial buildings, and in localities where records are incomplete. In such instances you may need to consult an architectural historian, who may supply an approximate date based on their knowledge of construction techniques, nails, saw marks, and so forth. There are publications that can provide help with interpreting such clues, but regional differences in building materials and techniques can hinder the reliability of these sources.

THE HISTORIC BUILDING

When was it built, and for whom? What was on the site before the building was constructed?

- Aerial Photographs
- Architectural Survey Files
- Building Permits and Blueprints (for urban properties)
- Business Records
- Census Records
- Chancery Records
- City and Business Directories
- CRM Reports
- Deeds
- Family Histories
- Historical Photographs and Illustrations
- Land Tax Books
- Local and State Histories
- Maps; Plats; Atlases
- Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia
- Newspapers
- Organization Records
- Patents and Grants
- Personal Papers
- Religious Institution Records
- School and Educational Records (for historic schools)
- Student Research Papers
- Tax Assessor's Office (for urban properties)
- DHR's V-CRIS Public Portal
- Wills, Inventories, and Estate Divisions
- Works Progress Administration Virginia Historical Inventory Project

What is the architectural style of the building; what period of construction does it suggest?

- Architectural Style Books
- Architectural Survey Files
- CRM Reports
- Student Research Papers
- Theme Files
- V-CRIS Public Portal
- Works Progress Administration Virginia Historical Inventory Project

Who was the architect or contractor?

- Architectural Survey Files
- Biographical Dictionaries
- Building Permits and Blueprints
- Business Records (e.g., The Manufacturers Record)
- Court Order Books (for publicly owned buildings)
- Deed Records (for institutional buildings)
- Local histories
- Maps; Plats; Atlases (for residential subdivisions and 20th-century industrial and commercial developments)
- Newspapers
- Organization Records
- Personal Papers
- Religious Institution Records
- School and Educational Records
- Student Research Papers
- V-CRIS Public Portal
- Works Progress Administration Virginia Historical Inventory Project

What changes have occurred to the building since it was first constructed, and what other buildings have stood there?

- Aerial Photographs
- Architectural Survey Files
- Building Permits and Blueprints
- Business Records
- Chancery Records
- City and Business Directories
- Court Order Books
- CRM Reports
- Deeds
- Historical Photographs and Illustrations
- Land Tax Books
- Maps; Plats; Atlases
- Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia
- Newspapers
- Organization Records

- Personal Papers
- Personal Property Tax Books
- Religious Institution Records
- School and Educational Records
- Student Research Papers
- Tax Assessor's Office
- Virginia Memory
- Wills, Inventories, and Estate Divisions
- Works Progress Administration Virginia Historical Inventory Project

- Newspapers
- Organization Records
- Personal Papers
- Professional Directories
- Religious Institution Records
- School and Educational Records
- Student Research Papers
- Theme Files
- Virginia Memory

THE OWNERS

Who has owned or occupied the building since it was constructed?

- Architectural Survey Files
- Biographical Dictionaries
- Business Records
- Census Records
- Chancery Records
- City and Business Directories
- Deeds (check local real estate tax maps online for deed cards)
- Family Histories
- Land Tax Books
- Local and State Histories
- Maps; Plats; Atlases
- Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia
- Newspapers
- Organization Records
- Personal Papers
- Personal Property Tax Books
- Religious Institution Records
- Vital Statistics Records
- Wills, Inventories, and Estate Divisions
- Works Progress Administration Virginia Historical Inventory Project

THE HISTORY

What happened here? How does the history of this property relate to larger events or historical trends?

- Aerial Photographs
- Architectural Survey Files
- Business Records
- Chancery Records
- City and Business Directories
- CRM Reports
- Local and State Histories
- Maps; Plats; Atlases
- Newspapers
- Organization Records
- Personal Papers
- Religious Institution Records
- School and Educational Records
- Student Research Papers
- Theme Files
- Virginia Memory

What is interesting or significant about the owner's life and career? For commercial and industrial properties, what enterprises operated here? If the building was owned by a congregation or organization, who were the members?

- Architectural Survey Files
- Biographical Dictionaries
- Business Records (i.e., the S. Bassett French Collection)
- City and Business Directories
- CRM Reports
- Family Histories
- Local and State Histories

THE SOURCES

The records listed under each question in the foregoing section are arranged here in alphabetical order and discussed in some detail. Some records may be available online, or in more than one location or repository; in such cases suggestions are made as to the best place to look.

For online records mentioned below, a website address is provided (please report any broken links to DHR if you encounter them). For physical records, the name of the repository (each located in the city of Richmond) is abbreviated: DHR (Department of Historic Resources); LVA (Library of Virginia; formerly the Virginia State Library and Archives); VHS (Virginia Historical Society); VM (Valentine Museum: Richmond History Center).

A list of Digital Library Collections follows. Many of the record types described below have been digitized, although by no means are all historic records digitized. A combination of online research and visits to local and state repositories is the best strategy for researching your historic property.

The next section, titled "The Principal Repositories," presents information about each repository (address, telephone number, hours of operation, and so forth).

Regarding all websites discussed herein, **DHR does not endorse, recommend, or otherwise approve of the sponsoring organizations or their content.** Researchers should exercise discretion and critical judgment in evaluating whether a website meets their personal needs. *Sharing of private information on any website is done at user's risk.* DHR disclaims any liability associated with use of these sites.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Locations: DHR; VDOT offices; USDA website; Google Maps, Google Earth, and Bing Maps; some city/county government sites maintain aerial photo archives.

Aerial photographs can provide documented history information as to the progression of a site on which a resource is located. They can



Archeological Site of Werowocomoco, Gloucester Co.

show how the area developed over the years, primarily from the 1930s onward. Using aerial photographs, a researcher can document changing agricultural uses, growth patterns of cities and towns, and changing land uses such as from agricultural to industrial or rural to suburban.

DHR has a small collection of aerial photographs, but also has the ability to use our GIS system to look at current aerial photography in house and some historic aerial photographs. The Virginia Department of Transportation has a collection of aerial photographs they have taken over the years; physical copies are kept at their downtown Richmond location, and digitized photos are online at www.virginiaidot.org.

Current aerial photographs may be ordered and/or viewed at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency website, www.apfo.usda.gov/, and at commercial sites such as Google Maps (www.google.com/maps), Google Earth (www.google.com/earth), and Bing Maps (www.bing.com/maps). An often-expanding range of historic aerial images also are available through Google Earth.

Local government office divisions such as environmental planning or county mapping may also be good locations to check for aerial photographs.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE GUIDES

Locations: DHR; LVA; VHS; other libraries; bookstores; various websites.

Several guides to American architectural styles have been published. Some are designed for the mass market, while others are aimed at scholars and architectural historians, who often debate stylistic classifications and technical terminology. A good compromise for the homeowner/researcher is Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 2nd edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013). The book has a bibliography in the back that lists other sources in the field, including some regional and local guides. For a guide to commercial and other buildings as well as dwellings, see *What Style Is It?: A Guide to American Architecture, Revised Edition* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003).

VHS has a notable and rare collection of nineteenth-century pattern books. These are the guides to architectural styles and design details used by architects and builders ranging from Thomas Jefferson to local contractors. DHR has a small research library containing many of the most popular pattern books, as well as reprints of catalogs for the popular mail-order and kit houses of the early twentieth century. DHR's library also includes a variety of architectural guides that feature different building types, such as churches, courthouses, schools, commercial buildings, agricultural outbuildings, and industrial properties, ranging from the late eighteenth century through the late twentieth century.

The LVA's collection has numerous books and articles about the history of architecture, Virginia architecture and architects, and various building types. See the LVA's online guide to using its collections here: http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_atoz.

Following is a list of websites with general style guides and digitized catalogs that you may find helpful:

- American Architectural Styles: <http://architecturestyles.org/>
- Antique Home: <http://www.antiquehome.org/>

- Antique Home Style: <http://antiquehome-style.com/index.htm>
- Archipedia by the Society for Architectural Historians: <http://sah-archipedia.org/>

ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY FILES

Locations: DHR; Certified Local Government offices; local historical societies.

Since its creation in 1966, DHR has conducted a statewide survey of historic buildings, urban and rural districts, and archaeological sites. Often working with local governments and private organizations, DHR assembles historical, architectural, landscape, and archaeological information, photographs, drawings, and maps for each property surveyed, and the resulting data are added to the DHR archives. If your building has been surveyed, information about it will be in a file at DHR. If your property already is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places, a copy of the nomination will be in the files. An individual property may also be located within a surveyed historic district and the survey files will include basic information on the individual property as well as detailed information on the area around it. All of the nominations for National Register-listed individual properties and historic districts within Virginia are available for download as PDF files at DHR's website, http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/register_counties_cities.htm.

Certified Local Governments (CLGs) are local governments that have incorporated historic preservation into their local planning process. Many CLGs maintain their own set of survey files. Check <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/clg/clg.htm> to see if you live within a CLG locality.

Local historical societies sometimes maintain local history files that include architectural survey records. The surveys may have been generated for different reasons, such as a local volunteer effort, to research a local history book or walking tour, or to prepare a historic district survey.

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARIES

Locations: LVA; other libraries; online sources.

For men and women of national significance, the standard reference source for many years was Allan Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1937). Supplements have brought the biographical sketches up to 1980. The successor to this publication is American National Biography, which is available online through a paid subscription at <http://www.anb.org/home.html>.

Several other biographical dictionaries have been issued, of varying degrees of completeness and accuracy. Perhaps the best-known reliable source is the *Who's Who in America* series, now divided into national regions and available in most libraries. Many libraries also have volumes of *Who Was Who* and regional and ethnic biographical directories.

The Publications and Public Affairs Division of the Library of Virginia undertook a monumental biographical project, the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. It was to be "a multivolume reference work containing biographies of all Virginians, regardless of place of birth or death, who were significant in the history or culture of their locality, state, and nation, including Kentucky prior to 1792 and West Virginia prior to 1863." The *Dictionary* subjects went well beyond the obvious categories of politicians and soldiers to include "all Virginians who were notable in local, state, national, or international history—be they farmers, entertainers, artists, scientists, physicians, lawyers, journalists, diplomats, athletes, aviators, musicians, craftsmen, clergy, pioneers, criminals, or poets." The first volume of the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, published in 1998, covers surnames from Aaroe through Blanchfield. Volume 2 (2001) covers surnames from Bland through Cannon, and Volume 3 (2006) includes surnames from Caperton through Daniels. Unfortunately, publication of the fourth volume stalled for lack of adequate funding. Biographical information associated with this project has been incorporated into the online Encyclopedia Virginia (<http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/>), making it readily available to the public.



Charles Goodman House, Alexandria. Goodman was an architect whose influential post-WWII modern housing designs are found in residential developments in Northern Virginia and elsewhere in the U.S.

The state archives at the Library of Virginia holds a collection of biographical data that is available on microfilm to researchers. It was compiled by S. Bassett French (1820-1898), a Virginia government official whose avocation was assembling biographical sketches of notable citizens of the nineteenth century. Many of the subjects of this collection are now forgotten figures and biographical data concerning them is hard to come by elsewhere. The LVA also has an online guide to biographical research

It is more difficult to obtain information about architects, builders, and contractors. The vast majority of Virginia buildings were not individually architect-designed. Most were constructed by local builders and contractors whose names are lost to history. Even when a building is so elaborate or unusual or reminiscent of an architect's known work that a historian would believe that it must be architect-designed, often the architect cannot be identified. Many architectural records have come and gone along with the architects. However, records from a number of prominent architectural firms are held by university libraries, especially those at the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech. Repositories outside of Virginia also sometimes have collections concerning architects who completed work in the Commonwealth. An online search may yield useful results.

Many buildings in America have been construct-

ed from stock plans. Until the late nineteenth century, these plans either came from pattern books published by architects or from the minds of the builders, who based them on other structures they had seen or built. Asher Benjamin and Andrew Jackson Downing are two of the best-known architects who published pattern books during the nineteenth century. Houses individually designed by architects for specific clients were largely the province of the wealthy, not the middle class.

Because architect-designed buildings are relatively rare, architectural historians have been careful to record them. The architectural survey files at the Department of Historic Resources are a rich source of information. Architect-designed buildings are often noted, or at least attributed, in local histories, guides to old houses, and other publications.

Information about the architects themselves, their lives and works, is often difficult to come by. The American Institute of Architects has created an online historical directory of architects, available at <http://www.aia.org/about/history/AIAB082017>. It includes the names of all national-level AIA members up to 1978 and digitized archival materials in the AIA's holdings.

Independent architectural historians have combed through newspapers, building permit files, and other records to compile and publish lists of architects and some of their identifiable works. For many years the standard authority on the subject was Henry F. Withey and Elsie B. Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970). Another excellent source with a nationwide scope is *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (Dreck Spurlock Wilson, ed., New York: Routledge, 2004).

John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton's *The Virginia Architects, 1820-1955: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond: The New South Architectural Press, 1997) is an excellent source of information that presents far more data concerning Virginia architects.

BUILDING PERMITS AND BLUEPRINTS

Location: LVA; local government offices

The LVA maintains an extensive collection of architectural drawings and plans, and a research guide for the collection is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn_13arch.pdf. Most of the collection pertains to the City of Richmond and surrounding counties. Beginning in 1908, the City of Richmond instituted a policy of issuing formal building permits. Part of the process for approval of a building permit was the submission of a set of architectural drawings and written specifications for the proposed project, both new structures and alterations or additions. The Office of Building Inspection reviewed and approved drawings and plans and issued building permits. Microfilm version of the index books, building permit application forms, the majority of the surviving architectural blueprints, and their building specifications are available at the LVA.

Beyond the LVA's historic collections, building permits typically are found at city or town halls. These can be especially useful for documenting properties that postdate 1900.

BUSINESS RECORDS

Locations: LVA; VM; VHS

Business records are usually in manuscript form, sometimes microfilmed, and typically contain letters, letter books, ledgers, etc. Some records have been digitized, or have been added to searchable online databases by the LVA (www.lva.virginia.gov), the VM (www.richmondhistorycenter.com), and the VHS (www.vahistorical.org).

One expects to find businesses functioning in the commercial centers of towns and cities, but in rural areas many businesses were conducted in or near one's home. Through the nineteenth century, farmers sometimes owned blacksmith shops or general stores. During the early- to mid-twentieth century, general stores often expanded to include gas stations. The records of these businesses often can tell you something about the people who operated them. Likewise, they can reveal what people were buying, how

they furnished and decorated their houses, and how they lived in general.

Business records also can provide important information about the history and activities of businesses and industries both large and small. Inventories, ledgers, correspondence files, and other records may help trace the path of a business's growth and evolution over time. This can be especially useful when researching an industrial property or a major downtown commercial property.

The Library of Virginia has a large collection of business records, and a list of the library's wide range of offerings is available at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_atoz. One series is of particular interest to researchers of houses. It is the papers and photographs of George B. Lorraine, a real estate agent in Richmond and Northumberland County, ca. 1930-1970. He specialized in eastern Virginia houses, especially farms and large estates. For descriptions of this and other business records, see Conley L. Edwards III, Gwendolyn D. Clark, and Jennifer D. McDaid, comps., *A Guide to Business Records in the Virginia State Library and Archives* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1994).

If your building or structure was built between 1882 and 1932—particularly if it is stylistically noteworthy and you suspect it was designed by an architect but you do not know who—you should consult the Manufacturers Record, which is available at the Library of Virginia. This weekly business magazine listed construction projects all over the South, including private dwellings, industrial structures, and small businesses as well as public buildings such as courthouses, and gave the names of the architects and contractors.

At the VHS, the Reynolds Business History Center (<http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/reynolds-business-history-center>) collects business history records as well as oral histories, artifacts, and electronic communications.

Other business publications worth consulting, if they exist for your area, are the promotional brochures produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by chambers of commerce and railroad companies. Additionally, they often contain illustrations and descriptions of the homes of prominent citizens, locally important businesses, and tourist attractions.

CENSUS RECORDS

Location: LVA; University of Virginia; Virginia Commonwealth University Library; VHS; online sources.

Census research can be a daunting and complex task. The National Archives provides a guide to census research here: <http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/index.html>.

The United States has taken a census of its inhabitants every ten years beginning in 1790. Unfortunately, the censuses of 1790, 1800, and 1890 were destroyed by fire; part of the 1810 census also was lost. A microfilm copy of each surviving Virginia census from 1810 to 1930 is at the LVA. In addition, certain special schedules also are available. They include Agriculture, 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880; Industry, 1820, 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880; Slaves, 1850 and 1860; and Social Statistics, 1850, 1860, and 1870.

The census of inhabitants did not include the name and age of every person in a family until 1850. Earlier censuses only give the name of the head of the household and the numbers of other household members grouped by age and sex. Beginning with the 1850 census, occupations and literacy are also noted.

The Agriculture schedules tell which crops and livestock were raised; the value of the farm and its equipment; and the number of improved and unimproved acres. A comparison of the various years available yields a fascinating picture of changes in farming.

The Industry schedules list the different kinds of industries active in each locality, including mills, quarries, factories, mines, ironworks, etc. Data includes raw materials consumed, quantities of

products manufactured, and the numbers of employees and their wages.

The Slave schedules, unfortunately, do not give the names of the slaves, only their sex and age. They are grouped in each locality under the name of the slave owner.

The Social Statistics schedules list, for each locality, the numbers of schools (with race and numbers of students for each), numbers of churches (with their seating capacities), and denominations by name.

The LVA has an extensive collection of census records for Virginia from 1810-1880 and 1900-1940. A guide to the records is here—http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/guide_census.htm#census. The Library of Virginia also maintains subscriptions to various online records that can be accessed from computers at the library.

You also may be able to access census records at a research library associated with one of Virginia's public universities, such as the University of Virginia (www.library.virginia.edu) and Virginia Commonwealth University (www.library.vcu.edu). Check with library staff about public access to a university's library before you go. The online census browser maintained by the University of Virginia is available free of charge at <http://map-server.lib.virginia.edu/>; however, information about individuals is not available through this site.

For anyone descended from enslaved African Americans, genealogical information historically has been very difficult to find. The VHS has created an online database, Unknown No Longer (<http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/>), which includes the names of all the enslaved Virginians who appear in the VHS's unpublished documents. The LVA also has a brief research guide for African American genealogy at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/AA_Genealogical_Research.pdf.

Finally, census information now is readily available online through various private companies. One of the most well-known paid subscription



A business building in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood.

services is Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com). If you do not wish to pay for a subscription yourself, you may be able to access this site from a computer at a nearby library. Free family-tree sites include Family Search (<https://familysearch.org/>), established by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and MyHeritage (<http://www.myheritage.com/>). When using these or similar sites, always exercise critical judgment and discretion when making personal information available online.

CHANCERY RECORDS

Locations: LVA; online

A chancery case is one not readily decided by existing written laws. A judge, not a jury, determines the outcome of the case. The earliest extant Virginia court records are those of the county courts. The end of primogeniture in Virginia in 1786 and the creation of general inheritance laws caused an increase in chancery cases; as a result, additional courts were created in which cases could be heard, including District Courts (1789–1808), Superior Courts of Chancery (1802–1831), Circuit Superior Courts of Law and Chancery (1831–1851), and Circuit Courts (1852–present). Chancery records are useful when researching genealogical information and land or estate divisions and may contain correspondence, lists of heirs, or vital statistics, among

other items. Cases in chancery often address estate and business disputes, debt, the resolution of land disputes, and divorce. A searchable index of chancery records is available at <http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/chancery/>. In the index, you will be able to see where the records themselves are accessible – typically at the LVA, the circuit court clerk’s office, and/or online.

CITY AND BUSINESS DIRECTORIES

Locations: LVA; VHS; VM; other libraries.

In the mid-nineteenth century, urban centers began to publish directories of inhabitants and businesses. Later in the century, regional directories appeared that generally included a city and surrounding counties at a minimum. The directories are arranged like telephone books, except that they give names, occupations, and street addresses. After 1880, they include a section arranged by street address, so you do not have to know the name of the occupant to locate a property. Most directories also have separate lists of businesses, craftsmen, and tradesmen. They are excellent guides to the occupations and businesses of Virginians during the last century or more and include extensive local advertising.

Examples of directories include: Elliott & Nye's *Virginia Directory and Business Register for 1852*; Randall's *Business Directory of Winchester, Berryville, and Front Royal, Virginia (1892/93)*; *Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer (1878-1917)*; *Virginia State Business Directory (1871/72)*; and many others.

COURT ORDER BOOKS

Location: LVA

County court order books or minute books have survived for many Virginia counties. They record all matters brought before the court when it was in session and may contain important information not found anywhere else. Generally minute books contain brief entries, while order books provide synopses of cases in a neater, more organized form. These volumes are sometimes internally indexed; more rarely, there is a comprehensive index. A

wide variety of information is found in order books, including appointments of county and militia officers, records of legal disputes heard before the county court, appointments of guardians, apprenticeship of children by the overseers of the poor, naturalizations, road orders, and registrations of free Negroes (prior to the Civil War). An online guide to using court order books is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn6_localrecs.htm#orders. The online index to city and county records on microfilm at the LVA is available here—<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local/>.

CRM REPORTS

Location: DHR

CRM reports are generated as a result of projects that must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, National Environmental Policy Act, National Transportation Act, and other environmental review processes. The reports document all types of historic resources, including buildings, landscapes, and historic districts. They are accessible at DHR’s Archives, which is open to the public Monday through Thursday, and are organized by the locality in which the project took place.

DEEDS

Best location: LVA to approximately 1865, local courthouses thereafter. For urban properties and for properties built during the twentieth century, start at the Tax Assessor’s Office for the most current information and work backwards from there using information such as parcel numbers and deed book numbers. Second-best locations: local courthouses and clerks’ offices.

Deeds are the records of the transfer of lands and buildings, or personal property, from a seller to a buyer. A deed contains the names of the parties involved, their places of residence, the purchase price, a description of the property (with metes and bounds in the case of land), and legal language ensuring the "quiet and peaceable" possession of the property by the new owner.

Rarely do deeds specifically mention buildings, except in boilerplate legal terms calculated to convey all types of property that are an integral

part of the land. Such phraseology may include "all houses, barns, trees, fields, orchards, water-courses," etc., whether or not they actually existed. On the other hand, buildings used for special purposes, such as churches and schools, may be mentioned in deeds. In such cases the property is usually conveyed to or by a group of trustees, a school board or superintendent, and so forth.

It is often difficult to use deeds to trace a particular piece of property containing a house or business, because the deed probably will not mention whether a building stands on the tract, and the boundary description seldom includes enough known landmarks to make the location obvious. If a tract contained more than a few acres, the chances are that pieces were sold off over the years. It is often not possible to tell from the deed alone whether the portion sold contained the building, or whether that part remained with the seller. Confusion can be avoided by using the LAND TAX BOOKS (see below) to trace the property instead, or by examining county plat books if they exist.

For most localities, indexed deed books (in which the deeds were recorded) exist as well as the original documents. The state archives at the Library of Virginia holds many original records. In addition, it has microfilm of the books, through about 1865, available for use in-house and on interlibrary loan. A guide to using county and city court records at LVA is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn6_localrecs.htm. For lists of the LVA's holdings, also see Suzanne Smith Ray, Lyndon H. Hart III, and J. Christian Kolbe, *A Preliminary Guide to Pre-1904 County Records in the Archives Branch*, Virginia State Library and Archives (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, [1994]) and Lyndon H. Hart III and J. Christian Kolbe, *A Preliminary Guide to Pre-1904 Municipal Records in the Archives Branch*, Virginia State Library and Archives (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, [1987]).

If you reach a dead-end while going backwards through the deeds, keep in mind there are indexes by date ranges listed under both buyers' and sellers' last names.

FAMILY HISTORIES

Locations: LVA; VHS; other libraries and historical societies.

The LVA and VHS are two principal centers for genealogical research in Virginia, and each holds large numbers of published genealogies and family histories. In addition, their archives maintain Bible records, personal papers, and other documents. For the archival resources in the Library of Virginia, go to http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_atoz. Written compilations of LVA collections include Lyndon H. Hart III, *A Guide to Bible Records in the Archives Branch*, Virginia State Library (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1985) and *A Guide to Genealogical Notes and Charts in the Archives Branch*, Virginia State Library (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1983). A guide to VHS's collections is here: <http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources>. Check also with your local library and/or historical society to see if their local history collection includes family histories.

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Locations: DHR; LVA; VHS; VM; Library of Congress; online sources.

Most buildings have undergone a surprising number of changes since they were built. Government, institutional, commercial, and industrial buildings are subject to frequent renovations, remodeling, and expansions as the needs of the occupant evolve over time. On houses, owners have replaced roofs, torn down porches, added ells and wings, and redecorated with new woodwork to follow changing fashions, just to name a few common alterations. Sometimes the "ghost" outlines of porches or mantels remain behind to help in restoration, but old photographs can be much more useful.

To find such photographs, look first at published local or regional histories, especially those with a "historic places" or "old homes" approach. Ask at local public and college libraries, too, as many have newspaper and manuscript files on their communities that may include old photographs. The online database, American Memory (<http://>

memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html), hosted by the Library of Congress features thousands of historic images from all periods of American history. Since the 1930s, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) has recorded significant historic properties of all types across the United States; documentation often includes photographs as well as drawings. The HABS collection is available online at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/.

If there is an architectural survey file at DHR, or if your building is listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register or the National Register of Historic Places, the relevant DHR files may contain historic photographs. Likewise, such photos may be found in the picture and post-card collections at the LVA, VHS, and VM, the latter of which has the notes and photographs of Mary Wingfield Scott, Richmond's foremost early- to mid-twentieth-century architectural historian and preservationist. The LVA holds two collections that contain photographs dating to the 1930s: the George B. Lorraine real estate company (see BUSINESS RECORDS above) and the WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION HISTORICAL INVENTORY PROJECT (below). Virginia Memory offers a diverse assortment of online photograph collections at http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/online_photo_collections.

Besides photographs, look for other kinds of illustrative material, such as old engravings and paintings of towns and cities. In the nineteenth century, "bird's-eye views" of towns and cities were painted and engraved, often in amazing detail. Also, thousands of photographs and field drawings made during the Civil War were reproduced in magazines and newspapers as engravings, particularly in Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. These engravings have been widely reproduced in illustrated histories of the war. Many of these historic images are in the public domain, and local history enthusiasts often collect them to post online.

Private individuals with an interest in a particular topic also often maintain websites or



Detail from a HABS scale drawing of the Shadwell train station, Albemarle Co. (Library of Congress)

blogs that feature numerous historic images. The origins and dates of historic images are not always easy to discern so exercise critical judgment when using them as information sources. One of the best known online photo archives is the Shorpy Historical Photo Archive (www.shorpy.com), but a general Internet search using keywords relevant to your historic property is likely to yield additional results. Finally, local libraries, historical societies, and local governments sometimes include a small online exhibit of historic photographs for their respective communities.

LAND TAX BOOKS

Best location: LVA. Almost complete original records, 1782-present. Land taxes 1782-1850 have been micro-filmed; film may be borrowed on interlibrary loan. Second best locations: County and city courthouses. Records tend to be spotty and incomplete.

Virginia's land tax records begin in 1782 and still are being compiled. They are arranged alphabetically by county and independent city, then chronologically. A given locality may have more than one tax book per year; as the population increased the locality was divided into districts or wards, each with its own volume. Within each volume the taxpayers are listed alphabetically (until the twentieth century by the initial letter of the last name). Beginning in the 1880s they were grouped by race.

From 1782 to 1819, the records give the following information: name of taxpayer; number of acres in tract; value per acre; total value of tract; amount of tax; remarks. From 1820 to the present the records show the following: name of taxpayer; county or city of residence; number of acres in tract; value per acre; value added to property because of buildings; total value of tract; amount of tax on land and buildings; remarks. In addition, after 1819—and sometimes before—there are columns for the location of the property ("Staunton River"; "Coles Hill"; "Woodlands"; "adj. [adjacent to] Charles Carter") and its approximate distance and direction from the courthouse ("12SE"="twelve miles southeast").

Of particular importance to researching a historic property are the columns for the value added because of buildings and for remarks. If a building is constructed on the tract it usually is noted in both columns. For instance, an increase in the first column from \$500 to \$2,000 should be noted as well as a comment on the order of "\$1,500 added for new construction" under remarks. If the property is sold or subdivided, the remarks column usually notes that fact ("30 acres to Joseph Smith"). If the 30-acre tract is what you are interested in, you will find it listed under "Smith, Joseph."

A warning: sometimes a change in the column for value added because of buildings indicates a tax reassessment rather than new construction. Statewide reassessments were made in 1817, 1819-1820, 1839-1840, 1850, 1856, 1870, 1872, 1875, and every five years thereafter. Do not assume that an increase in the value added column during or just after one of those years means new construction; check the remarks column for a clear statement to that effect. Look at other properties in the tax list; if their values also changed, then you are in a reassessment year. Remember that a decrease in the value added column does not necessarily mean that buildings were destroyed or demolished. It probably indicates a reduction in the value of an older building during a reassessment year.

What can you conclude from the values assigned

to buildings? As a very rough rule of thumb, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a value of \$500 or so might indicate a small story-and-a-half frame dwelling. A value of \$1,500 or \$2,000 could suggest an elaborate frame house or a relatively modest two-story brick dwelling one room deep. Values of more than \$3,000 generally hint at mansion-sized houses, often of brick, two stories high, and two rooms deep on each story. The value declined as a house aged and deteriorated.

Religious facilities, schools, government buildings and other properties owned by religious organizations or national, state, or local governments are not subject to taxation. The land tax books can still be of some use; for example, if the land was conveyed by a private citizen to, for example, a congregation, school board, or local government, that transfer may be noted under the citizen's name in the year it took place. This notation may substitute for the missing deeds of a county that has lost its records through some disaster.

The LVA has an online index to land tax records at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/landtax.asp>, and has published the *Research Notes Number 1, Using Land Tax Records*, at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn1_landtax.pdf.

LOCAL AND STATE HISTORIES

Locations: DHR; LVA; VHS; local libraries.

There are several good resources which outline the history of Virginia. Ronald L. Heinemann authored a single-volume chronology of the Commonwealth from the colonial period onward in *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: a History of Virginia, 1607-2007*. This piece includes social and political history, juxtaposed with the significant historical events of the North American continent. Public and private libraries in the Commonwealth contain a plethora of titles which describe the history of Virginia. Using these resources, as well as internet searches and academic journals, can be useful tools for understanding the historical context of a property.

Another single-volume reference is Emily J.

Salmon and Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr., eds., *The Hornbook of Virginia History, 4th ed.* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1994). Besides presenting a brief narrative history of the state, the *Hornbook* serves as "a ready-reference guide to the Old Dominion's people, places, and past." It contains lists of the state's executive officers, "Virginians in the Nation's Service," counties, cities, colonial parishes, rivers, selected historic places of worship and houses, as well as a host of other data.

The online Encyclopedia Virginia (<http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/>) is a free, user-friendly site with articles prepared by top scholars and historians on an extensive variety of topics. An interactive online map allows users to see locations of historic events and to click on the event name to access the full article.

Histories have been published about most of the cities, counties, and regions of Virginia. They vary widely in accuracy, scholarship, and reliance on local tradition or documentary sources. Your property or its owners may be mentioned, but you should exercise caution in assessing what is written, especially concerning the dates ascribed to early buildings.

You should consult your local public or college libraries for unpublished collections of notes and clippings as well as for printed histories. Many local historians have compiled considerable data yet failed to prepare manuscripts. Their unpublished notes and papers may nonetheless be highly valuable to other researchers.

MAPS; PLATS; ATLASES

Locations: DHR; LVA; VHS; VM; local governments; online sources

The LVA and the VHS have large collections of maps, ranging from general maps of the state to specialized maps showing the surveyed routes of turnpikes and railroads. An index to LVA's map collection is at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/map/>, and a guide to using the maps is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn4_maps.pdf. For more information in general about maps, go to the LVA's website, http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.

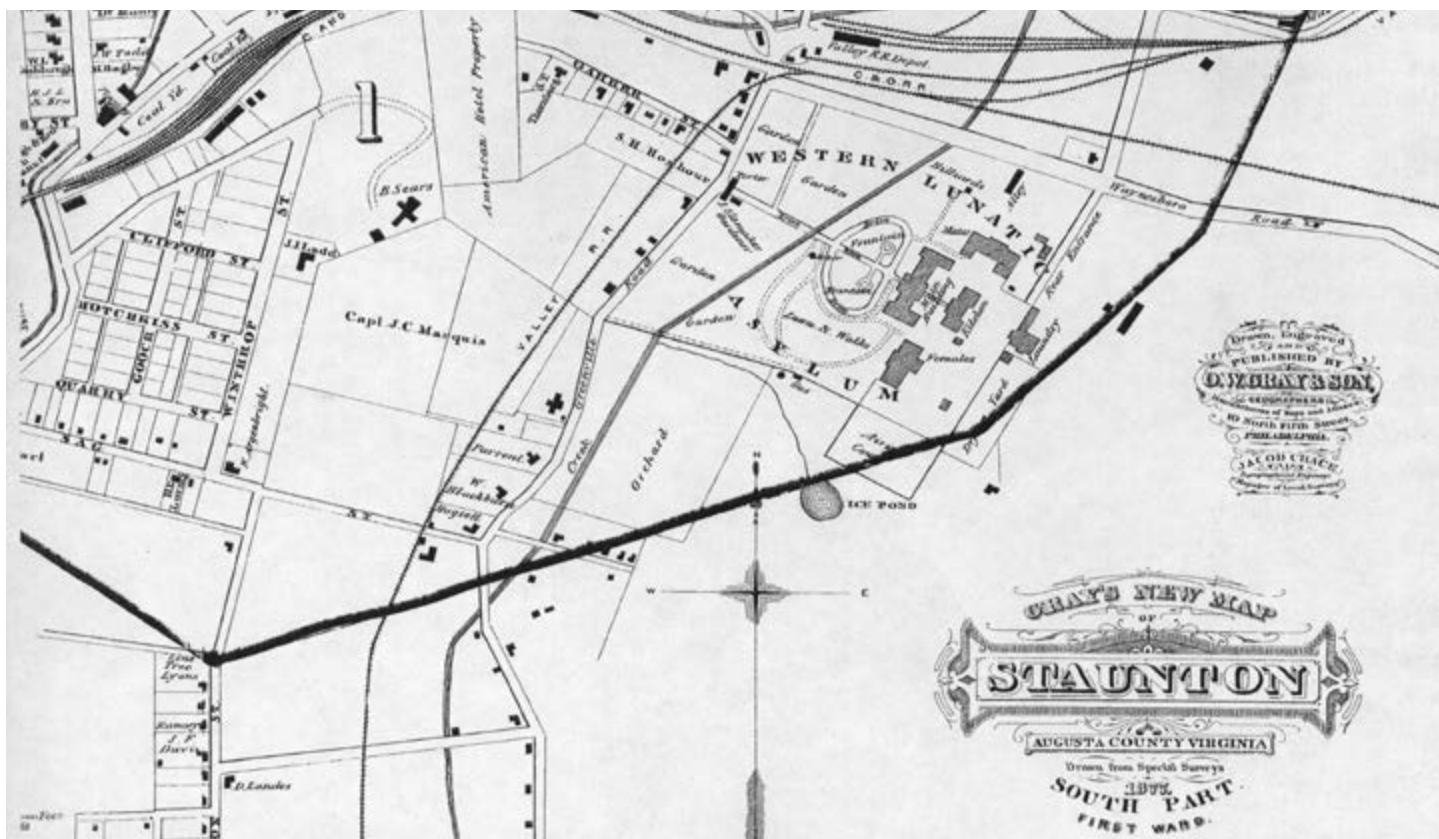
[asp#_guides](#), click on Guides and Indexes, then click on Maps and Architecture.

Maps can be very useful in getting you started on the way to tracing the ownership of your property, especially if you are uncertain of the names of the owners in the nineteenth century and earlier. For example, if you own a house that was constructed in a style popular in the mid-nineteenth century, such as the Greek Revival, it likely was built before the Civil War. It probably will appear on Civil War-era maps with the name of the owner or occupant noted. You can now go from the map to the LAND TAX BOOKS (see above) and begin tracing the line of ownership.

For many years beginning in the 1870s, the Sanborn-Perris Map Company produced maps of towns and cities for use by insurance companies. These maps showed the configuration or "footprint" of each building on its lot, noted the materials of which it was constructed, and indicated its function. They are an invaluable source of information for all kinds of structures in urban settings. A complete set of original maps is in the Library of Congress; the VM has an index to properties noted on the maps for the city of Richmond. The LVA has a microfilm copy, as well as many originals, and a link to the online Sanborn Map Geo Edition is available at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_atoz by scrolling down to click on the Alphabetical Listing and then to Sanborn Maps Geo Edition. The site offers historical Virginia fire insurance maps searchable by address or geographic coordinates, and allows maps from different years to be layered on top of each other and over modern street, satellite, and hybrid images.

Sometimes plats of specific tracts of land (see PATENTS AND GRANTS below) are filed in map collections. They typically note the metes and bounds of the tracts, as well as any roads or watercourses that border or cross the boundaries. You may occasionally find a plat on which a stylized dwelling or other building is drawn.

City and county courthouses often contain record groups that include plats and other useful



Detail from an 1877 map of Staunton.

information concerning buildings and their owners. You may find plat books that date to the colonial period in some localities. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many farmers went bankrupt, resulting in hundreds of lawsuits. Often the court papers contain plats and accounts of land divisions. Finally, beginning in the late nineteenth century, many localities (especially cities) began issuing building permits. Frequently, plats and drawings are found in the permit files.

Atlases can also be useful sources of information about standing structures. One of the best is *The Official Atlas of the Civil War* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1958), which was compiled from the official records of the war. If your building was constructed before the war began, and if there was military activity in or near your county, there is a good chance that the property and the name of its owner or occupant will appear in this atlas.

If you are researching a historic canal, road, turnpike, or other internal improvement, the LVA's Board of Public Works collection is an excellent

source for Virginia's internal improvements during the nineteenth century. It includes maps, plans, correspondence, field survey notes, and other materials. An online inventory and index to the collection is at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/bpw.htm>.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing through the twentieth century, plat maps and subdivision plans began to be filed with local government offices. These typically include information about a development's layout, the original developer, builder, and/or architect, and construction dates. The local tax assessor's office, building inspector, planning and zoning, clerk's office, or other local government division are the best places to check for these types of maps.

Additionally, many state and local governments now use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to keep track of properties in their jurisdictions. Government agencies use GIS to manage and analyze geospatial information that applies to many aspects of planning, zoning, land-uses, emergency services, and other critical decision-making

processes in government, business, and the community. This provides the researcher with up to date digital data regarding a specific property, which can be easier to access and more complete than traditional records. Typical GIS sites allow a user to search for a property by owner name, address, or tax parcel number. Tax assessor information is commonly accessible through a GIS search. To find out if your local government hosts a GIS website, contact local officials (the planning department is often a good place to start), or do an online search using your locality's name and GIS as keywords. Although online records are an excellent place to start research, please bear in mind that in these records, the construction dates for historic buildings are often inaccurate and should be cross-checked against other records.

Historic map and GIS experts at various public and private institutions have created numerous websites that offer various types of mapping information to the public. One such example is the National Map (<http://nationalmap.gov/>) created by the U.S. Geological Survey. Among other things, the site allows users to create their own maps using data from the National Atlas of the United States. USGS topographic maps dating back to 1884 can be viewed and downloaded at <http://nationalmap.gov/historical/>.

MUTUAL ASSURANCE SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

Locations: DHR; LVA.

The "Mutual Assurance Society, against Fire on Buildings, of the State of Virginia," was incorporated by the General Assembly on 22 December 1794, and still is in operation. It is not so much an insurance company as a mutual aid society whose members have pooled their resources for the protection of each property. Initially, the Society assured against losses on brick and frame buildings in Virginia, present-day West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In 1820 it stopped assuring frame structures, and in 1822 it abolished its country branch (quit assuring buildings not in towns or cities). Its insurance policies, or "declarations," are fascinating historical documents that contain descriptions of many Virginia houses and commercial buildings, and a smaller

number of churches, schools, and public buildings. Usually each declaration includes the value of each building insured; a drawing showing the relationship and distance from one building to another (and sometimes a front elevation of the principal building); and a description of each building ("A dwelling house 32 feet by 20 one storey high with a shed of 10 feet by 10 on one side with a porch at the side of the shed 8 feet by 10, [walls] built of wood and covered with wood [shingles]"). Since properties were frequently revaluated, succeeding declarations often show additions to the original building, new outbuildings, and new uses for old buildings.

Assurance declarations are indexed under the city or county in which the property is located by the name of the person taking out the policy, and by the name or type of property. Some caution should be exercised when using these records, however. Just because a policy was taken out in 1806, for example, does not necessarily mean that the structure was newly built. It could have been an older building insured for the first time. Near the bottom of the policy is a paragraph that will state both the insured amount (the "present value") and the replacement cost: if they are identical, the building was new; if the present value is less than the replacement cost, then the building was not new and a deduction was made for deterioration. Also, owners were not obliged to insure every building; often, for instance, only the main house and kitchen were insured but not other outbuildings. In other words, the declarations may not list every structure on the site.

The LVA's online guide to its Mutual Assurance Society collection is at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/mutual.asp>.

NEWSPAPERS

Locations: LVA; VHS; VM; other libraries; online sources

Many libraries hold newspaper clippings under various subjects, or indexes to birth, marriage, and death records published in the papers and abstracted by local historians and genealogists. Also, nineteenth- and twentieth-century newspapers sometimes carried articles about

ground-breaking or opening ceremonies for important commercial and public buildings, as well as photographs, drawings, and illustrated advertisements that may show you how an old mercantile structure looked when it was new. The articles and illustrations also may give the name of the architect or builder. In addition to your local library or historical society, the LVA, VHS, and VM are major repositories of historic newspapers.

Although newspaper publishing in Virginia dates to the eighteenth century, and many papers have opened and folded over the years, there may still be a few extant copies of early small-town newspapers. The LVA holds thousands of original newspapers, as well as copies on microfilm. They also have a subject file for news articles called "the Freeman File" which can be obtained from the reference desk. An online guide to conducting newspaper research at LVA is here: <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/newspaper-Research.pdf>. The LVA also participates in the United States Newspaper program, a national effort to locate, describe, inventory, preserve, and provide public access to the United States imprint newspapers. The Virginia Newspaper Project can be accessed at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/vnp/>.

The Library of Congress maintains an online database, *Chronicling America* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>), that can be searched by state, year of publication (between 1836 and 1922), and/or keyword. Search results are displayed as digitized images of the actual historic newspaper with the search words highlighted. Images can be saved to an individual's computer as PDF or jpg files. The LVA participates in the *Chronicling America* program, but also has established *Virginia Chronicle* at <http://virginiachronicle.com/>. Research guides and indexes provide a comprehensive overview of the available resources for newspaper research.

ORGANIZATION RECORDS

Locations: LVA

The LVA's collections include organization

records for social, cultural, military, civic, non-profit, genealogical, charitable, and other organizations that have operated in Virginia from the late eighteenth century through the late twentieth century. A full list of the organizations is available at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/organization_records.htm.

Organization records can provide useful information about historic events and activities at a particular property, as well as information about individuals' activities in their communities. Such information is helpful for tracing the history of specific churches, schools, fraternal halls, synagogues, charitable offices, government buildings, businesses, political parties, and mosques, and the history of larger social and political movements, such as those for civil rights, veterans, women's rights, abolitionism, disestablishment of religion, and numerous other topics.

PATENTS AND GRANTS

Location: LVA

The state archives at the LVA holds the records of the Land Office, including patents and grants. A guide to the Land Office records is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/Research_Notes_20.pdf. The royal governors of Virginia issued patents in the name of the king between 1623 and 1774. After an interlude because of the Revolutionary War, the state's elected governors began issuing land grants in 1779. In the Northern Neck Proprietary (that part of Virginia north of the Rappahannock River), the Fairfax family issued its own grants between 1690 and 1808. A guide to these records is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn23_nneckland.pdf.

Colonial patents were in effect purchases of land directly from the royal government rather than from another subject. Anyone could pay the fees and obtain a patent; although the document was issued in the name of the king, it did not mean that the king and the recipient knew each other (the statement is sometimes made that someone "received a patent from the king").

Some patents were issued for the importation of "headrights." To encourage immigration to the colony, fifty acres of land could be claimed by anyone paying for an immigrant's transportation. Often the names of the immigrants were included in the patent document. This fact is sometimes construed to mean that the immigrant arrived from England in the year the patent was issued, but that was not necessarily the case. The patent was issued after proof that the transportation fees were paid, and the process could have taken some years. Also, the immigrants could have been from countries other than England, or even from other colonies. Finally, just because the patent was issued for land in a particular county, that does not mean that the immigrant lived there, only that the county was where the vacant land was found.

Because patents—and grants—were issued to encourage actual settlement and not land speculation (although the latter occurred anyway), the recipients were given three years to "seat and save" the patent, which otherwise would revert to the colony. In other words, the patentee was supposed to erect a building on the land and improve part of it within three years. Sometimes present-day owners assume, erroneously, that a dwelling obviously dating from the colonial period was built the year the patent was issued. It is far more likely that the patentee erected some temporary structure, now long-vanished, and that the dwelling currently standing was built a generation or more later. This is certainly true of seventeenth-century patents and generally true of those issued in the eighteenth century.

Besides the patents and grants, which like deeds give the metes and bounds of the property, the researcher will find the extant plats useful. Unfortunately, the Land Office burned the plats annually before 1774 once the patent had been issued, so few colonial plats survive. An exception is the Northern Neck Proprietary, which kept its plats. Plats are generally available after 1779 statewide, and some of them show—besides the boundaries of the property—watercourses, woodlots, and dwellings.



Hawthorne and Old Town Spring in Winchester was the residence of Civil War diarist Cornelia Peake McDonald.

For a detailed list of all the records of the Land Office, see Daphne S. Gentry, comp., and John S. Salmon, ed., *Virginia Land Office Inventory, 3d ed., rev. and enl.* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1988). See also Nell Marion Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, 3 vols., in various editions, for abstracts of patents, 1623–1732. Two additional volumes, published by the Virginia Genealogical Society, have brought the series up to 1749. These are also now searchable online under the digital library/land records.

PERSONAL PAPERS

Locations: LVA; VHS; VM; local libraries and historical societies

Letters, diaries, unpublished memoirs, and other items comprise personal papers collections at several repositories. Perhaps the two largest collections in Virginia are found at the VHS and the LVA. These papers may tell you about the private and public lives of owners, the construction and maintenance of their houses and commercial buildings, and the operation of their farms and businesses. All of the repositories holding personal papers have guides or indexes to them for use in-house. A frequent shortcoming of letters and diaries is that their authors often omit any mention of the familiar: a diarist may live in a house for years and yet never describe it directly. On the other hand, a traveler who keeps a diary or



A commercial building in the Danville Tobacco Warehouse Historic District.

writes letters about his journey may comment at length on what to him appears unusual, often in highly opinionated and judgmental language. Look, then, for travelers' diaries and letters that pertain to your area; some may have been published in local historical society magazines.

PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX BOOKS

Best location: LVA. Almost complete original records, 1782-present. Second best locations: County and city courthouses. Records tend to be spotty and incomplete.

The personal property tax books can help you assess the relative prosperity of your building's owners, based on personal property owned and taxes paid. The books give the following information: name of taxpayer; number of horses; number of cattle (during a few early years); number of slaves above age twelve (through 1863); other categories of taxes levied; and amount of taxes paid. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, taxes were levied almost exclusively on machinery, vehicles, and intangible personal property such as bonds. Usually the tax books also list by name the persons who received licenses to operate taverns, ordinaries, businesses, and other occupations. The categories of taxes levied on personal property in 1815 were increased significantly to pay for the War of 1812. Carriages, paintings, gold watches, billiard tables, and a wide

variety of other items were taxed, making the tax books for this year a rich source of information concerning personal belongings. Also taxed were dwellings located in the country that were worth more than \$500 (the number of dwellings and their value, or sometimes only the difference between \$500 and their value, is given). This is the only year in which buildings were mentioned in the personal property tax books.

No tax books exist for the years 1808 or 1864. In 1808, the General Assembly ordered the commissioners of the revenue not to collect taxes that year. On 3 March 1864 the legislature suspended the revenue act because the treasury already held adequate funds.

An online guide to using the personal property tax records at the LVA is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn3_persprop.pdf. An online guide to personal property tax records on microfilm at the LVA is at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/pptax.htm>.

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORIES

Locations: LVA; other libraries.

If you know the profession or trade of an owner of your house or commercial structure, he may be listed in a published directory of professions or trades. Many such directories have been printed, and each is a sort of Who's Who for a particular occupation. Besides outlining professional careers, the directories may give personal data as well. The aforementioned online historical directory of architects maintained by the American Institute of Architects (available at <http://www.aia.org/about/history/AIAB082017>) is such an example.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION RECORDS

Locations: LVA; VHS; individual churches, synagogues, mosques and other facilities; institutional repositories.

Records maintained by religious institutions may contain lists of births, baptisms, conversions, marriages, and deaths. They may consist of vestry or session minutes. They may mention the

construction or repair of a building. In other words, their contents may be personal or institutional. They may be kept at individual properties, or in the collections of an institutional historical society. One of the largest collections of religious records (many on microfilm or in other copy formats) is found at the LVA, which has created research guides to different aspects of its collections. For instance, the African American Church Histories guide is at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/African_American_Churches.pdf. Also see Jewell T. Clark and Elizabeth Terry Long, comps., *A Guide to Church Records in the Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1988). The VHS has original and microfilmed church records as well.

Major religious organizations often maintain historical records about their organizational history. Although these records often have not been digitized, a phone call or Internet search may provide you with important information about a property's history or its historical association with an important event or person.

SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL RECORDS

Locations: LVA, school libraries; newspaper; local historical societies

Information on schools, teachers, and events can be found in documents such as local school board minutes or The Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Institutions (at the LVA). Some school records are among the organizational records indexed at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/organization_records.htm.

The School Buildings Service Photographs Collection (<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/schoolabout.htm>) is a visual record of hundreds of elementary and secondary school buildings across Virginia. This photographic survey was commissioned by the Department of Education beginning in the 1920s as part of the movement to consolidate and reform school systems. The LVA also maintains a collection entitled, Virginia Dept. of Education, School Buildings Service, Architectural drawings and plans, 1920-1970.

The online exhibit, Brown vs. Board of Education: Virginia Responds (<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/brown/>) is an in-depth online exhibit about Virginia's handling of school desegregation during the mid-twentieth century. The Desegregation of Virginia Education website (<http://www.lib.odu.edu/specialcollections/dove/>) is a collaboration of universities, libraries, and community groups to document the process of public school desegregation in Virginia.

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

Locations: DHR; state university libraries.

Student Research Papers often provide a solid beginning for research on topics including buildings, architects, owners, and architectural materials. For example, Virginia Commonwealth University has courses whose professors require well researched papers on buildings and style information around the city of Richmond. These papers should also include solid bibliographies that will lead a researcher back to original referenced material.

Searches for student research papers usually can be conducted through the school's online library catalog, such as the following: Virginia Commonwealth University (www.library.vcu.edu), University of Virginia (www.library.virginia.edu), Virginia Tech (www.lib.vt.edu), James Madison University (www.lib.jmu.edu), and the College of William and Mary (<https://swem.wm.edu>).

TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

Locations: City Hall Buildings, and city/county government websites

The local government's Tax Assessors office will have the most current information on properties within its city, including current owner, most recent deed purchase, and tax parcel number. This will provide a starting point for deed research and provide some current property information such as lot size, building materials, construction date, addition dates. As mentioned above (see MAPS; PLATS; ATLASES), tax assessor's records are often available online through a local government's GIS website. Floor plans, dimensions, deed cards, and construction dates are among the information types collected by tax assessor's

offices. The accuracy of these records can vary depending on the method of data collection that was used. If possible, cross check tax assessor's records with other sources.

The Virginia Assessor and Property Tax Records Database (<http://publicrecords.onlinerecords.com/Virginia-Assessor-and-Property-Tax-Records.htm>) is an online directory of all city and county government tax assessor's and property tax records in Virginia.

THEME FILES

Locations: DHR, LVA, VHS, VM, other libraries and historical societies

Many facilities have files on subjects that include things such as unpublished papers or newspaper clippings. Ask the archivist or someone at the reference desk for assistance. As organizations increasingly work to digitize records, these materials may become available online; however, the oldest materials will likely continue to be available only in physical formats.

V-CRIS PUBLIC PORTAL

Location: DHR: <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/vcris/MapView/Account/Logon?returnUrl=%2Fvcris%2FMapView%2F>

DHR provides a public portal to our online database of architectural survey files. The site permits researchers to search for historic properties by DHR inventory number, property name, locality, street number, street name, and historic district name. Information returned about individual properties includes its DHR inventory number, property name, locality, address, and whether it is within a historic district. Locations of resources also can be viewed on maps with an aerial photo, topographic, or street map background. All properties in DHR's online database have been identified through some type of architectural survey project. DHR's survey records date to the late 1960s.

VIRGINIA MEMORY

Location: Online; LVA
<http://virginiamemory.com>

Virginia Memory is part of the online presence of the Library of Virginia, the state archives and reference library. The following sections of the website are most useful for researching historic properties:

- **Digital Collections** provide access to LVA's traditional digital image collections available through the online catalog; digital asset management tool, DigiTool; and partnership programs with the Library of Congress (Chronicling America) and the Internet Archive (Archive-It). Searchable databases in the Digital Collections include Virginia newspapers, archived content from websites of enduring cultural value, and online photo collections. Additionally, there are two databases, one organized alphabetically and the other by topic, for searching all of LVA's digitized content.
- **Reading Room** is where the newest digital content is posted on a regular basis.
- **This Day in Virginia History** offers a document, image, or sound file with contextual information for each day of the year.
- **Virginia Chronology** offers over 650 different events—42 of which have related digital images—that have occurred over the more than 400 years that have shaped the history of the commonwealth.
- **Exhibitions** are virtual versions of physical installations at the Library of Virginia and are organized by topic.

VITAL STATISTICS RECORDS

Location: LVA; online sources

The state did not begin keeping vital records (births, marriages, deaths) until 1853. Before then, birth and death records were maintained (if at all) by churches (see RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION RECORDS). Marriage bonds, and in many cases records of marriages, were kept by county and city governments before 1853. Birth and death records were not kept by the state between 1897 and 1911.

The Library of Virginia has microfilm copies of the state's records of births (1853-1896), marriages (1853-1935), and deaths (1853-1896). It also has indexes to the birth and marriage records,

in the latter case by both groom and bride. No index to death records has been compiled. There is no charge for viewing the microfilm of these records. Copies of the microfilm may be lent to other libraries from The Library of Virginia–Archives Division, Inter Library Loan Department.

For more information about vital statistics records, see the LVA's online research guide at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/note2.pdf>. To find guides for the different record groups, go to http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_guides and click on Births, Deaths, Marriages (Vital Records).

In the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Vital Records, marriage, divorce and death data becomes public information fifty (50) years from the date of the event and birth data becomes public information one hundred (100) years from the date of the event. To obtain these records, a researcher must apply in person at the Virginia Department of Health in Richmond and pay a fee. These birth and death records are released only to relatives or lawyers. Please note that the Office of Vital Records is not equipped to assist with genealogical research. For further information, please visit the Office of Vital Records website at http://www.vdh.state.va.us/vital_records/.

WILLS, INVENTORIES, AND ESTATE DIVISIONS

Best location: LVA.

Second best locations: local courthouses and clerk's offices.

Wills present the deceased's wishes as to the distribution of his or her estate. Inventories list personal property, excluding land, and sometimes indicate the tract on which the property was kept, or the room in the house or commercial structure in which it was found. Divisions of estates, often made when there was no will or when a will was disputed by the heirs, often include land as well as other property. Sometimes plats are recorded along with the divisions.

For most localities, indexed will books (in which all the foregoing documents were recorded) exist as well as the original papers. The state archives



The former Wythe County Poorhouse.

at the LVA holds many original books and papers. In addition, it has microfilm of the books, through about 1865, available for use in-house and on interlibrary loan.

The LVA has an online catalog that indexes the administrations, inventories, wills, and other recorded documents relating to the estates of individuals for the period to 1800. It presently includes 52 Virginia counties and cities. The index can be accessed at http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp#_atoz by scrolling down to click on the Alphabetical Listing, then to Wills and Administrations, Index to.

For lists of the Library's holdings, see Suzanne Smith Ray, Lyndon H. Hart III, and J. Christian Kolbe, *A Preliminary Guide to Pre-1904 County Records in the Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, [1994]) and Lyndon H. Hart III and J. Christian Kolbe, *A Preliminary Guide to Pre-1904 Municipal Records in the Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, [1987]).

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION HISTORICAL INVENTORY PROJECT

Best location: Online, through the LVA website

The WPA Historical Inventory Project, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, began in November 1935 and ended by 1939. It employed clerks, writers, and editors to survey and record the historic cultural and



A photo from June 1943 shows students at Randolph Henry High School in Keysville (Charlotte Co.). The photo was taken by Farm Security Administration photographer Philip Bonn, who wrote: "Students don't have much money so they bring produce from farms for which they receive tickets. Lunches cost about fifteen cents. Typical lunch for fifteen cents: candied yams, macaroni and cheese, fruit salad, deviled eggs, dessert and milk. Milk is free and children have as much as they want." (Library of Congress)

architectural resources of the state. The field workers, most of whom had no particular expertise to bring to their tasks, wrote descriptions and took photographs of thousands of buildings, objects, and structures. The quality of these reports varies widely, and they often contain a mixture of documented facts and local legends. The photographs are often useful, however, as records of a building's appearance in the mid-to-late 1930s. Unfortunately, photographs do not exist for a substantial fraction of the recorded properties. An article about the WPA Historic Inventory Project in Virginia is at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/vhiarticle.htm>.

The Library of Virginia holds the original files and photographs. These records are now available online at http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas15&local_base=CLAS15. Searching may be done by keyword, by category, as well as through scanned copies of the 1930s-era highway maps used to record the locations of the historical resources that were recorded during this project. Microfilm copies of the project files in alphabetical order by locality (Film 509; 30 reels) are available for use at the Library of Virginia as well, and for inter-library loan within the state. Every county and city in Virginia is represented in the files except for the counties of Amelia, Bland, Brunswick,

Charles City, Charlotte, Clarke, Essex, King and Queen, Mathews, Richmond, and Smyth. The photographs of houses, churches, schools, businesses, and other buildings that accompanied the files were separated from them before microfilming and were then transferred to the library's Picture Collection. You will need to examine the microfilm and visit the Picture Collection in order to see the complete record in person. The online records include the images with TIFF files of each individual page of the record for the property or object.

DIGITAL LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

The following list is of digitized collections at libraries, historical societies, universities, and government agencies that are relevant to researching historic properties in Virginia. New digital collections and online exhibits are being created constantly. It is well worth consulting one or more of these collections when you begin your research project.

- American Memory by the Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>
- African American Historic Sites Database: <http://www.aaheritageva.org/#>
- Built in America by the Library of Congress: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/
- Chronicling America by the Library of Congress: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
- College of William & Mary: <https://digitalarchive.wm.edu/>
- Colonial Williamsburg: <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary.cfm>
- Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE): <http://www.lib.odu.edu/specialcollections/dove/index.htm>
- DHR's Historic Markers Online Database: <http://dhr.virginia.gov/HistoricMarkers/Account/Logon>
- DHR's V-CRIS Public Portal (Historic Architecture Database): <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/vcris/MapView/Account/Logon?returnUrl=%2Fvcris%2FMapView%2F>
- Digital Librarian: <http://www.digital-librarian.com/history.html>

- Discovering American Women's History Online: <http://digital.mtsu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/women>
- Encyclopedia Virginia (includes Dictionary of Virginia Biography): <http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/>
- Geography of Slavery in Virginia: <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/>
- History of Loudoun County, Virginia: <http://www.loudounhistory.org/index.html>
- Library of Virginia: http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp
- NASA Langley Research Center: http://crgis.ndc.nasa.gov/historic/Langley_Research_Center
- National Map: <http://nationalmap.gov/historical/>
- City of Newport News: <http://www.nngov.com/library/services/datasub>
- Northern Virginia Digital History Archive: <http://novahistory.ctevans.net/>
- Piedmont Virginia Digital History: <http://www.piedmontvahistory.org/archives/index.php/collections>
- City of Roanoke: <https://www.roanokeva.gov/85256A8D0062AF37/vwContentByKey/N27CGT7U680ASELEN?open>
- School Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia: <http://www.lib.odu.edu/specialcollections/schooldesegregation/index.htm>
- Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia: <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/tje>
- University of Richmond: <http://dsl.richmond.edu/>
- University of Virginia: <http://www.library.virginia.edu/research/>
- University of Virginia Digital Collections: <http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog>
- University of Virginia Electronic Text Center: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/civilwar/>
- Unknown No Longer: a Database of Virginia Slave Names: <http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/>
- Valentine Museum: Richmond History Center: <http://collections.richmondhistory-center.com/>
- City of Virginia Beach: <http://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/libraries/research/localhistory/Pages/Digital-Collections.aspx>
- Virginia Beach Public Library Digital Archives: <http://cdm16450.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/search/searchterm/Whitehurst>
- Virginia Center for Digital History: <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/index.php?page=Projects>
- Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Digital Collections: <http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm/>
- Virginia Historical Society: <http://vhs4.vahistorical.org/star/x.starmarc.html>
- Virginia Memory – Library of Virginia: <http://virginiamemory.com>
- Virginia Military Institute: <http://www.vmi.edu/archives/home/>
- Virginia State University: <http://contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm/search/collection/VSUD>
- Virginia Tech: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/index.html>

THE PRINCIPAL REPOSITORIES

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES (DHR)

2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
(804) 367-2323 Ext. 125 (archives)
www.dhr.virginia.gov

Hours: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, Tuesday-Thursday. Closed Friday through Monday, and state holidays.
Telephone inquiries?: Yes, but much better to come in person and review the files yourself.
Custodian of the official state survey of Virginia's historic resources and archaeological sites. More than 130,000 files.

LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA (LVA)

800 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 692-3500
www.lva.lib.va.us

Hours: 9:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M., Monday-Saturday. Closed on state holidays.
Telephone inquiries?: No, except for general questions about the availability of records; for specific research queries, you must come in person or request interli-

brary loan microfilm if available.

The Library of Virginia (LVA) is the research library at the seat of government and custodian of the official records of the Commonwealth. LVA's collections are vast and are expanding all the time. To get an overview of the library's offerings, check the online catalog at <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/>. The LVA's online catalog combines the "Books & Journals" catalog, the "Archives & Manuscripts" catalog, and the "Images & Indexes" databases, providing researchers with instant search results that can include published books and magazine articles, historic documents, maps, and digitized historical photos.

For a comprehensive list of all the electronic records accessible through LVA, visit this webpage: http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp.

VALENTINE MUSEUM: RICHMOND HISTORY CENTER (VM)

1015 East Clay Street
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 649-0711
www.valentinemuseum.com

Hours (for library use): 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays, by appointment only. Nominal fee.
Telephone inquiries?: Yes, but much better to visit in person.
The museum of the city of Richmond, it includes artifacts, a library, a photo archive, and a manuscript collection.

VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

428 North Boulevard
Richmond, VA 23221
(804) 358-4901
www.vahistorical.org

Hours: 10:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M., Monday-Saturday; galleries only, 1:00-5:00 P.M., Sunday. Closed most holidays. Nominal fee.
Telephone inquiries?: Yes, but much better to come in person or to request films and books through interlibrary loan.

Called "The Center for Virginia History," the Virgin-

ia Historical Society includes a historical museum, a library, and a large manuscript collection. Many of the manuscripts are cross-referenced in card catalogs.

LOCAL REPOSITORIES

In addition to the repositories listed above, you may need to visit others locally to see specific public records. Building permits typically are found at city or town halls. Court records, deeds, wills, and the like that are not in the state archives at the Library of Virginia (on film or in the original) are maintained at the clerk's offices in Virginia's county seats. Some local government offices will answer telephone inquiries, but many are so busy that you are better advised to write or—first choice—visit the office yourself. Similarly, county or city historical societies or museums may hold photographs, newspaper files, and other information about area businesses, houses, churches, schools, and other buildings.

Many local libraries (public, university, or collegiate) have area history rooms or collections, as well as student research papers on surrounding architectural themes.

Find It Virginia (<http://www.finditva.com/>) is an online collection of databases that provide free full text access to a variety of magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, and other reference works. To use the site, researchers must have a valid library card from a Virginia public library.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DHR – Department of Historic Resources
LVA – Library of Virginia
VHS – Virginia Historical Society
VM – Valentine Museum: Richmond History Center

Notes



Corncrib / barn at Furr Farm in 2012, Loudoun County.

Researching Your Historic Virginia Property was financed in part with funds from the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, through the Department of Historic Resources. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Dept. of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or handicap in its federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program or activity described herein, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The contents and opinions of this report do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Dept. of the Interior, nor does any mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Dept. of the Interior. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, will make this publication available in Braille, large print, or audiotape upon request. Please allow 4–6 weeks for delivery.

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