



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Librarian of Virginia

December 28, 2018

TO: The Honorable Ralph Northam
 Governor of Virginia

 The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
 Co-chair, Senate Finance Committee

 The Honorable Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
 Co-chair, Senate Finance Committee

 The Honorable S. Chris Jones
 Chair, House Appropriations Committee

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Reducing the Archival Backlog at the Library of Virginia

Gentlemen:

Per item 236 B in the Commonwealth's Appropriation Act for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018, I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on the Library's progress to date in reducing its archival backlog. This report covers the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this report, please feel free to contact me at 692-3535 or sandra.treadway@lva.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra G. Treadway".

Sandra G. Treadway

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education
 Daniel S. Timberlake, Director, Department of Planning & Budget
 Adam Henken, Budget Analyst, Department of Planning & Budget

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Library of Virginia

FY 2018 Annual Report on Reducing the Archival Backlog

The 2018 Appropriation Act (item 236B) requires the Librarian of Virginia and the State Archivist to conduct an annual study of the Library's archival preservation needs and priorities and to report annually to the Governor and the co-chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees of the General Assembly on the Library's progress to date in reducing its archival backlog.

Background

The Library of Virginia has served as the official archives for the commonwealth since the Library's founding in 1823. The Library holds the records created by the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and all agencies of state government since 1776. Our comprehensive archival holdings also contain many of the surviving records of colonial government prior to statehood and the records of many Virginia localities from the earliest days of settlement through the modern era. In addition, the Library holds the papers of Virginia families, businesses, churches, and organizations whose activities document the daily lives of Virginians across four centuries and provide insights into our collective history not found in official records alone. The volume of this rich and heavily used archival collection has increased significantly over time as government has grown in size and complexity, as citizen interest in donating historical material for preservation and research has increased, and as recording practices have become more effective and technology oriented. Today, the Library's archival holdings number in excess of 125,000,000 items, making the Library's collection one of the largest of any state archives in the United States.

When records are brought into the archives (through transfer, purchase, or donation), a staff member documents receipt, assigns an accession number to the collection, and conducts a preliminary assessment of the size, content, and condition of the new material. In a perfect

world, the newly acquired records would then be assigned to an archivist for processing, an essential step in preparing manuscript collections for use by researchers. As the Library has many more collections than it has archivists to process them, most newly acquired materials are accessioned and then placed in secure storage, often for many years, until processing work can begin. A processing archivist organizes a collection so that the information it contains can be found, identifying the most important subjects that a collection covers. If the collection or record group is paper-based, the documents are placed in acid-free folders and boxes, each of which is numbered, labeled, bar coded, and entered into the Library's online collection management system. A finding aid describing the contents of the collection is also created and linked to an entry in the Library's online catalog. Processing a collection also includes conserving any documents that might need attention, ranging from removing rusted staples and repairing tears in the paper to cleaning dirt and mold off surfaces where present.

While the archives is still receiving paper records from state agencies and outgoing gubernatorial administrations, the preponderance of records transferred from the Governor's Office are now in electronic format. Electronic records are much more complicated and expensive to manage, preserve, process, and make accessible, requiring the skills of information technology professionals as well as archivists. Information technology staff are essential to ensure that all permanent electronic records are safely stored on secure servers. IT staff provide ongoing monitoring of the records to protect the integrity of the data, to prevent data corruption, and to schedule the migration of the records to new formats and platforms as technology changes. The archival staff processing electronic records are not only dealing with formal correspondence, reports, and more conventional documents found in paper-based collections but face the daunting challenge of making the e-mail exchanges of state officials accessible as well. The Library's records management staff provides guidance to the Governor's Office and Cabinet secretaries on eliminating all non-public information from their electronic accounts, but most officials do not have time to sift through four years of their records before leaving office. Thus, the state archives receives materials that are not public records or that are permanent records but contain privacy-protected information that must be redacted before it is released. A processing archivist needs to review the contents of every record to remove non-public records from the permanent archive (to avoid paying long-term storage costs for electronic files that should never have been transferred) and to redact all legally protected information prior to release. Records in the Governor's Office can contain information about state and homeland security protocols and procedures, personnel files, probation reports, proprietary records and trade secrets, social security numbers, social services cases, juvenile justice files, and many other types of protected information. Once that review is finished, the processed e-mails and attachments must be converted to PDF format and run through Optical Character Recognition (OCR) so they are keyword searchable, and they are then ingested into the Library's digital asset management system where they can be accessed remotely by the public via the Library's website.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, long before the era of electronic records, the Library began to experience a backlog of unprocessed archival collections as the volume of incoming material exceeded the capacity of staff to keep pace. This backlog continued to grow over several decades, hampering access to important historical collections. In 1999, the research and genealogical community in Virginia strongly supported the Library's request to the General Assembly for additional library and archives staff to address the backlog. A budget amendment approved that year provided funding for 17 new staff positions to undertake this work. With the additional staffing in place, the Library made significant headway in reducing the backlog, and was on track to have it largely eliminated by a target date of 2022.

Then came the economic downturn of 2008, followed by several years of substantial budget reductions that resulted in a significant loss of staff across the agency. In 2008 the Library had 30 staff processing all its archival collections; at the close of FY18, that staff had been reduced to 16. Ten of the 16 processing archivists are assigned to the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program and are paid with special funds generated through that program. They can only work on the local court records that are covered by this program and cannot be reassigned to work on other collections. We currently have only 4 archivists working on the backlog of state records, which has increased exponentially with the huge influx of born-digital and electronic records that the Library now receives from each gubernatorial administration.

Current Archival Backlog

In 1999, when the General Assembly added 17 staff positions to the Library to address the backlog of unprocessed archival material, the backlog of State, Private, and Local records together stood at 17,186 cubic feet or approximately 25,779,000 manuscript pages. The archives contained no electronic records at that time so the backlog consisted exclusively of paper records. The loss of state funding that supported these positions in the budget reductions between 2008 and 2014 combined with the huge influx of electronic material that has come into the archives from the administrations of Governors Kaine, McDonnell, and McAuliffe has caused the backlog of unprocessed archival material to grow substantially. We now estimate the backlog of paper records to be 24,816 cubic feet, or approximately 37,224,000 manuscript pages. The backlog of unprocessed electronic files is approximately 4.6 TB or approximately 17,026,098 electronic files.

State Records

The State Records collection contains the historically significant records created by the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Virginia government. It is the largest collection in the state archives and provides the official documentary record of Virginia government from 1776 through present. In addition to the records of Virginia's governors, the collection includes

the papers of state agencies, boards, commissions, constitutional conventions, the General Assembly, and the Supreme Court. The state archives also contains the surviving records of Virginia's colonial and revolutionary governments that preceded statehood, including the earliest records of the Virginia General Assembly.

During the twelve-month period between July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018, State Records staff processed a total of 529 cubic feet (approximately 793,500 pages) of State Records in paper format and 199,091 electronic files. During the same period, State Records staff accessioned 843 cubic feet of paper records (approximately 1,264,500 pages) and 2.65TB of electronic records from Governor McAuliffe's administration (totaling 3,823,547 files). With accessioned material far outpacing our staff's processing capacity, the archival backlog grew during the past fiscal year and will continue to grow at a rate that creates serious problems for genealogists, historians, journalists, and other researchers eager to access historical information and for the general public who are interested in the most recent records of state government.

Among the many historical State Record paper collections processed during the past year are the Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports, 1800 – 1909, found in the papers of the Auditor of Public Accounts. These reports provide a wealth of information about nineteenth-century state and local social services as well as genealogical information that is not available elsewhere. Processing of the Military Rule Election records for 1867 – 1869, housed within the Secretary of the Commonwealth's collection, this year has made accessible the names of the first African American Virginians ever to vote in the state's history. The Library also released nearly 27,000 electronic records documenting the work of the Secretary of Education's Office during the administration of Governor Tim Kaine, adding to the large body of electronic material already released through the Kaine Email Project (<http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/kaine/>).

Private Papers

The Library's Private Papers collection encompasses Bible records, business records, cemetery and church records, genealogical notes and charts, organization records, and personal papers. These collections, which range in size from a single sheet of paper to more than 1,000 cubic feet of material, represent about 10 percent of the Library's holdings but are heavily used by genealogists and historians. They often arrive at the library completely unorganized and require careful processing before they can be used effectively by researchers. Our records indicate that there are currently 505 unprocessed Private Papers collections containing approximately 4,538 cubic feet of material, plus 426 volumes, 2,400 cassettes, and microfilm, CDs, and flash-drives.

During the twelve-month period between July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018, the one Private Papers staff member we had processed 6 cubic feet of Private Papers (approximately 9,000 items).

During the same time period, he accessioned 137.2 cubic feet of records (approximately 205,800 items), which has added to the unprocessed backlog.

Included among the unprocessed Private Papers collections are the papers of numerous state legislators, including R. Edward Houk, Jay Katzen, Linda T. Puller, Patricia S. Ticer, and Robert Tata, and the congressional papers of U.S. Senators Charles Robb and George Allen. Other unprocessed collections that have high research interest include the papers of the National Ideal Benefit Society, a fraternal organization founded in Richmond in the early twentieth century to provide insurance to African Americans, and the papers of Martha Ann Woodrum Zillhardt (1916-2002), daughter of Congressman Clifton Woodrum and one of the first female aviators in Virginia.

Local Records

The Library's Local Records program oversees a large collection of historically significant records created by Virginia cities and counties from the earliest days of Virginia history. While many historical records remain in courthouses across the state under the custody of local circuit court clerks, about 25,000 cubic feet of local records have been transferred to the Library for preservation and access. Approximately 12,000 cubic feet of these (or approximately 18,000,000 items) have yet to be processed. The Local Records collection housed at the Library and in the Archival wing of the State Records Center includes the records of local circuit and county courts, land records, marriage records, tax and fiscal records, wills, and other similar records documenting Virginia history at the grass roots level.

Staff in the Local Records program, whose positions are funded through revenue earned under the Virginia Circuit Court Records Preservation program, focus on processing our Local Records holdings and scanning and indexing local chancery court records for uploading into the Library's heavily used Chancery Records Index database (http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/chancery/?_ga=2.194996909.1464403837.1545856797-1516398669.1544713005). In addition to digitizing and indexing these invaluable records, during the twelve-month period between July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018, the Local Records staff processed a total of 98.1 cubic feet of records (approximately 147,150 items). The backlog of unprocessed Local Records continued to grow, however, as during the same period, the staff accessioned an additional 185.7 cubic feet (approximately 278,550 items).

The unprocessed Local Records in the Library's collection contain a goldmine of information that researchers have not yet been able to use. One example of a collection that researchers are anxious to use are the 850 boxes of Richmond City court records for the period 1785-1950. These boxes include chancery causes, criminal suits, freedom suits, free negro registrations, naturalization records, prohibition records, and records covering many other subjects that will shed new light on the social, racial, economic, and political history of the Commonwealth's

leading city. These records often contain detailed family information and stories about the life circumstance of Virginians in the past that are not found in any other records.

Ongoing Challenges

The Library of Virginia's holdings comprise the most comprehensive collection of material documenting Virginia's history across four centuries that is available anywhere. We are the premier research institution for the study of Virginia in the world. Not only do historians, genealogists, journalists, museum professionals, state agencies, and other similar groups rely on our collections, but the information that the Library has provided from the documentary record entrusted to our care has made important and lasting contributions to state commemorations of our shared history. In recent years, the Library and its collections have played an important part in the work and legacy of the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, the War of 1812 Commission, the Virginia Women's Monument Commission, and American Evolution, the 2019 Commemoration, to name just a few.

Throughout its nearly 200-year history, the Library has never had sufficient resources to catalog and process its collections as quickly as they come in. There has always been a backlog of unprocessed collections. The progress that was made in 1999 with the funding received for additional staff was unfortunately wiped away during the aftermath of the recession of 2008. Although the Library has an authorized employment level of 198, at the close of FY 2018 we could only afford to fill 125 of these positions, leaving us with 73 unfilled vacancies. As a result, the backlog of unprocessed collections will continue to increase and public frustration with the time lag in accessing our collections will grow. We will continue to explore new approaches and solutions to the challenges we face, such as the promising research project we are assisting with at Waterloo University to develop an artificial intelligence tool to help with the review of electronic collections. We are also watching how the National Archives and other state archives are addressing these challenges. When we identify an innovative best practice in the archival field, we adopt it. But to date there are no quick fixes to the challenges of making archival collections, in paper and electronic format, accessible to users while also ensuring their long-term preservation well beyond the twenty-first century.