



# LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

**Sandra Gioia Treadway**  
*Librarian of Virginia*

December 3, 2019

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, 2019, 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, 2018 through June 30, 2019.

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this report, please feel free to contact me at 692-3739 or [mike.strom@lva.virginia.gov](mailto:mike.strom@lva.virginia.gov).

Sincerely,

Michael Strom  
Virginia State Archivist, Director of Government Records Services

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  
                  Sandra G. Treadway, Librarian of Virginia, Library of Virginia

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## **Library of Virginia**

### **FY 2019 Annual Report on Reducing the Archival Backlog**

The 2019 Appropriations 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.

The Library's backlog of "unprocessed" archival collections, those collections that are in our possession but unavailable to researchers because archivists have not reviewed the material and prepared inventories to facilitate researcher access, started growing in the latter half of the twentieth century as the volume of incoming material exceeded the capacity of staff to keep

pace. The backlog has increased substantially in the past ten years due to several budget cuts since 2008 and the proliferation of electronic records. In 2008 the Library had 30 staff processing all its archival collections; at the close of FY19, that staff had been reduced to 15. Nine of the 15 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. Two archivists work on collections of private papers. That leaves just four 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.

### **Governor's Records**

The Library is currently in the process of reviewing the last batch of email from Governor Kaine's administration. We have made little to no progress on the records from the McDonnell and McAuliffe administrations. During the last session, the legislature identified this ten-year delay in providing access to these records as a problem and considered, but ultimately did not approve, funding for additional archivist positions to help us make them available sooner. This fall, we prepared and submitted a budget ask for the Governor's Office to review. The budget ask is similar to what the legislature considered last winter. It includes funding for four positions and to employ artificial intelligence in our processing to make it as quick and efficient as possible. If funded, this ask would address the backlog by allowing us to complete the McDonnell email by the end of FY 2021 and the McAuliffe email by the end of FY 2022. We would begin work on email from the Northam Administration in FY 2023, and we would spread the work over four years to be ready for the next governor's email by the time that governor leaves office (2026).

The large and increasing backlog is not a case of us self-imposing rigid standards that slow down the work. We are required in the Code of Virginia (§ 2.2-126) to process gubernatorial records before we release them to the public and, with just four people dedicated to processing records from state agencies, we simply do not have the capacity to keep pace with the amount of records we receive. In fact, our staff has made the most of the resources at our disposal by working with professors at a university in Canada to develop a system to employ artificial intelligence to help speed the review of email. The Library of Virginia has been a leader in the archival profession in this area. We are proud of our efforts to date, but we need more resources in order to reduce the backlog.

## **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 37,709 cubic feet, or approximately 56,563,500 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, 2018–June 30, 2019, State Records staff processed a total of 520 cubic feet (approximately 780,000 pages) of State Records in paper format and 189,701 electronic files. During the same period, State Records staff accessioned 376 cubic feet of paper records (approximately 1,264,500 pages) and 2.77TB of electronic records from various state agencies (totaling 3,996,688 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.

During the past year, State Records staff prioritized records from the Governor's Office, records in need of conservation, and records with the greatest research value. Among the many paper collections they processed during the past year are records from Governor Kaine's administration, records from the Auditor of Public Accounts, Governor Pollard's executive papers, the records of the Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Unclaimed Property Papers. The Library also reviewed over 120,000 email from 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/>).

### **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 25,500 cubic feet of local records have been transferred to the Library for preservation and access. Approximately 12,350 cubic feet of these (or approximately 18,525,000 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. Some of these records have been digitized and are available on the

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 (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/>). In addition to digitizing and indexing these invaluable records, during the twelve-month period between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019, the Local Records staff processed a total of 86 cubic feet of records. The backlog of unprocessed Local Records continued to grow, however, as during the same period we received an additional 437 cubic feet of records (approximately 656,250 pages).

The local records in the Library's collection are a tremendous resource for those doing genealogical research on African Americans who lived in Virginia from the establishment of slavery in the 1600s until its demise in 1865. The potential research value of these records is highlighted by a group of records scanned and available in Virginia Untold (<http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>), a database available on the Library's website.

### **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, 2018–June 30, 2019, the two Private Papers staff members we had processed 25.48 cubic feet of Private Papers (approximately 9,000 items). During the same time period, he accessioned 56.67 cubic feet of records (approximately 38,220 items), which has added to the unprocessed backlog.

Included among the unprocessed Private Papers collections are the papers of from several churches, church groups and religious benefit societies, including the Persons United Methodist Church (1838-2003), the Covington Sunday School in Alleghany County (1834-1865), and the records of the Independent Order of St. Luke (Richmond, Va.) 1897-1945. Other unprocessed collections that have high research interest include the papers of the Garber Family who were Mennonites in Augusta County (1871-1985), the papers of Professor Jon Dasu Longaker (1929-2002) who was hired as a curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and who taught art at Randolph-Macon College, and the papers of Geneva Burford who served in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps during World War II.

### **Ongoing Challenges**

With an eye toward our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023, the Library of Virginia recently adopted a bold new strategic plan. Collecting material to document the “new Virginia” is a key initiative in the plan. The Commonwealth and its residents continue to evolve and make history. An important part of the Library’s mission is to document, preserve, and provide access to that history. The growing backlog of unprocessed materials threatens the Library’s ability to fulfill this essential duty.

It is true that the Library has always operated with a backlog of unprocessed archival material and it has been incumbent upon the staff to seek out and adopt new and efficient procedures and practices to address the backlog. The staff has done that in recent years by utilizing artificial intelligence to help speed the review of email and incorporating faster, more minimal processing techniques when dealing with less-confidential records. Still, the backlog is increasing at such a rate that the agency’s responsibility to support government transparency by providing timely access to information is threatened. Staff morale is also suffering under the weight of a backlog that seems more and more unmanageable.

Our ongoing challenges include prioritizing collections in the backlog in order to provide access to the most important records as soon as possible and continuing to seek ways to speed the processing of collections in the backlog. At the same time, we must balance this progress with the Library’s goal of collecting records documenting the “new Virginia.”