

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Preparation is the Key	1
START IN A COUNTY COURTHOUSE ... or?	1
COUNTIES CAN HAVE PARENTS TOO.....	2
COUNTIES FORMED FROM THE INITIAL COUNTY OF RESEARCH.....	2
DOES THE COUNTY STILL EXIST?	2
INDEPENDENT CITIES	3
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS	3
WILL THEY BE OPEN?.....	3
CAN YOU HANDLE THE RECORD BOOKS?.....	4
PACKING WITH A PURPOSE.....	4
WHAT'S IN YOUR BRIEFCASE	5
TAKING FILES	5
MAPS.....	6
SKILLS TO PRACTICE BEFORE LEAVING.....	7
READING THE HANDWRITING.....	7
TRANSCRIBING FAITHFULLY	8
BOOKS AND TAPES WILL ASSIST	9
ABSTRACTING.....	10
OTHER PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	10
SHOULD YOU TAKE YOUR COMPUTER INTO THE COURTHOUSE?	10
PHOTOCOPYING	10
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	11
Chapter 2: You're There—Now What?	13
ARRIVING AT THE COURTHOUSE	13
STARTING THE SEARCH.....	14
EXPECTATIONS	14
HINTS FOR SUCCESS	15
DIFFERENCES IN INDEXES	16
NUMBERING OF RECORD BOOKS.....	16
A VARIETY OF INDEXING SYSTEMS.....	17
RUSSELL INDEX SYSTEM	17
ADDITIONAL HINTS WITH THE RUSSELL SYSTEM.....	19
THE CAMPBELL SYSTEM AND OTHER "FIRST NAME" INDEXES.....	19
COTT INDEXES	20
GRAVES TABULAR INITIAL INDEXES.....	21
ADDITIONAL INDEXES	21
CAN'T FIND A NAME IN THE INDEX?.....	21
DID THE INDEX ERR?.....	21
DID YOU MISS SOME ENTRIES?	22
WHAT'S MISSING IN THE INDEX?	22
USING THE INDEX FOR MAXIMUM RESULTS	22
AFTER THE INDEX IS EXAMINED	23
BROUGHT YOUR COMPUTER?	23
LEGAL AGE.....	24
THERE WAS A FIRE!.....	24
THOSE OTHER RECORDS ON THE SHELVES	25
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	25
Chapter 3: Property Matters	27
IMPORTANCE OF LAND OWNERSHIP	27
STATE-LAND STATES vs. FEDERAL-LAND STATES	28
SURVEYING DIFFERENCES	29

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3, con't..	
LAND SURVEYS.....	30
INDEXES FOR LAND RECORDS	30
ENTRY BOOK INDEXES	33
PECULIARITIES OF DEED INDEXES IN LAND RECORDS	33
WHAT DO DEED INDEXES INCLUDE?	34
INDEXES PREPARED BY OTHERS	35
TYPES OF DOCUMENTS	35
TERMINOLOGY	40
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	45

Chapter 4: Searching for Property Records 47

THE OFFICE FOR LAND RECORDS.....	47
TYPES OF RECORD BOOKS	47
DEED BOOKS	47
SURVEY BOOKS AND WARRANTS.....	47
PLAT BOOKS AND PLAT MAPS	49
POWERS OF ATTORNEY BOOKS	49
MORTGAGE BOOKS	49
WHAT A DEED TELLS US	50
THE RECORDING PROCESS.....	51
CLUES IN THE DEEDS	53
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS	55
PHOTOCOPYING.....	55
SR. AND JR., ELDER AND YOUNGER, 1ST AND 2ND	56
ABSENCE OF RECORDS	56
STRATEGIES FOR SEARCHING LOCAL LAND RECORDS.....	57
CONNECTING FAMILIES THROUGH THEIR DEEDS	58
RECORDS NOT A PART OF THE LOCAL LAND RECORDS	58
LAND RECORDS ARE CRUCIAL TO RESEARCH.....	59
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	60
DEED TRANSCRIBED AND ANNOTATED.....	61

Chapter 5: Estates Galore 65

WHICH OFFICE HANDLED ESTATES?	65
WAS THE ESTATE PROBATED?.....	66
WOMEN AND WILLS.....	67
KINDS OF ESTATES.....	67
THE PROBATE INDEXES	68
TERMINOLOGY	72
UNDERSTANDING THE LAW	74
NAMING CHILDREN IN THE WILL	75
PRIMOGENITURE OR DOUBLE PORTION	75
DAUGHTERS.....	76
INTESTATE DIVISION PER STIRPES OR PER CAPITA.....	77
HEIRS AT LAW, SONS-IN-LAW, AND OTHERS	77
PROBATE COURT MINUTES and COURT ORDERS.....	78
THE ESTATE PACKETS.....	79
BUT KEEP IN MIND.....	80
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	81

Chapter 6: Estate Documents 83

WILLS (Testate Proceedings)	84
CODICILS TO WILLS.....	85
MORE THAN ONE KIND OF WILL.....	85
THE PROBATE PROCESS	86
OTHER DOCUMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH ESTATES	88
PETITION	88

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 6, con't.	
BOND	89
"LETTERS" ISSUED	90
INVENTORY	90
ACCOUNT	91
ACCOUNTS OF SALE AND SALE BILL.....	92
PETITION FOR SALE OF REAL ESTATE	92
FINAL SETTLEMENT OR FINAL DISTRIBUTION	93
RENUNCIATIONS	94
ADMINISTRATIONS.....	95
RELINQUISHMENT IN AN ADMINISTRATION.....	95
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR OR OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIAL	96
GUARDIANSHIPS	96
GUARDIANSHIP OF MINORS	96
BONDS FOR GUARDIANS	96
ENTAILED PROPERTY IN THE HANDS OF MINORS	97
CHOOSING A GUARDIAN FOR A MINOR	97
NEXT FRIEND	97
GUARDIANSHIPS FOR INCOMPETENTS.....	97
COMMITTEE (IN CASES OF INCOMPETENCY)	98
GUARDIAN'S ACCOUNTS.....	98
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	98
Chapter 7: Milking Every Clue from Estates	99
LET'S CONSIDER.....	99
ENTAILS.....	99
WERE THERE TWO WILLS?	100
WILLS OF UNMARRIED ADULTS	100
MAKING IT FAIR.....	101
GLEANING CLUES FROM WILLS	101
MORE ON PACKETS.....	103
VARIED DOCUMENTS IN THE ESTATE PACKET (ANNOTATED).....	104
TRANSCRIBING A WILL.....	105
ABSTRACTING A WILL	106
WILLS ARE MARVELOUS IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.....	108
IS A SEARCH AMONG ESTATES WORTH THE EFFORT?	109
DON'T BE CONTENT WITH ONE RECORD	110
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	110
Chapter 8: Understanding the Court System	111
THE COURT SYSTEM	111
TYPES OF COURTS	111
OUR LEGAL SYSTEM.....	113
RECORD BOOKS.....	114
TYPE OF DOCUMENTS.....	118
CIVIL COURT INDEXES.....	120
THE FILE PACKETS: Civil and Criminal.....	121
TERMINOLOGY	122
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	126
Chapter 9: Civil and Criminal Court	127
CIVIL RECORDS.....	127
FINDING CIVIL COURT RECORDS IN THE COURTHOUSE	128
INDEBTNESS.....	128
JUDGMENTS	129
YOUR STRATEGY IN BECOMING ACQUAINTED WITH CIVIL COURT RECORDS	130
THE CIVIL COURT PROCESS	130
OTHER RECORDS WHICH MIGHT BE FOUND.....	131

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 9, con't.	
CHANGES OF NAME	131
TAX RECORDS	131
HOW TAX RECORDS HELP YOU.....	132
WHAT WAS TAXED	133
LAND BOOKS	133
TAX ASSESSOR	134
TAX FORECLOSURES.....	135
ROAD RECORDS	135
ROAD COMMISSIONERS	135
CORONER'S RECORDS.....	136
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS.....	136
NATURALIZATIONS	137
LOCATING THE NATURALIZATION PAPERS.....	138
NATURALIZATION OF WOMEN	139
FORMATION OF BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION	139
DIVORCES.....	140
CAN'T FIND THE DIVORCE PROCEEDING?	141
CRIMINAL MATTERS.....	141
THE "GAOLS"	142
BAIL BOND	142
DUTIES OF A CRIMINAL COURT CLERK.....	142
JURIES	143
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	143

Chapter 10: Birth, Marriage, and Death 145

REGISTRATIONS OF VITAL RECORDS	145
WHICH COURTHOUSE OFFICE?	146
CITIES MAY KEEP THEIR OWN RECORDS	146
ARE THE RECORDS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC?	146
REGISTER BOOK INDEXES AND THEIR ORGANIZATION	147
TRANSCRIBING AND ABSTRACTING VITAL RECORDS	148
BIRTH RECORDS	148
DELAYED OR CORRECTED BIRTH RECORDS.....	149
OTHER COURTHOUSE DOCUMENTS CAN SUBSTITUTES FOR BIRTH RECORDS	149
LOCAL CUSTOMS HELP	151
MARRIAGES	152
THE PROCESS BY LICENSE OR BY BANNS	152
MARRIAGE APPLICATION AND THE LICENSE	153
MARRIAGE BONDS	154
MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES	154
MARRIAGE REGISTERS	154
MARRIAGE CONTRACT	155
WHERE DID THEY MARRY?.....	155
SUBSTITUTE MARRIAGE RECORDS.....	156
BREACH OF PROMISE.....	156
COMMON-LAW MARRIAGES	157
SPECIAL NOTES ON MARRIAGES.....	157
DEATHS	157
WHERE IS THE DEATH REGISTER AND WHAT'S IN IT?	158
WHEN YOU CANNOT FIND THE DEATH RECORD.....	159
SUBSTITUTE RECORDS CAN PROVE A DEATH	159
VITAL RECORD ASSISTANCE.....	160
ONE ACTION CAN PROVE BIRTH, MARRIAGE, AND DEATH.....	161
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	162

Chapter 11: The Internet, Microfilm, and Libraries 163

THE INTERNET AND COURTHOUSES.....	163
CYNDI'S LIST IS ALWAYS A PLACE TO START.....	163

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 11, con't.	
OTHER CYNDI'S LIST RESOURCE ITEMS.....	164
USGENWEB.....	164
COUNTY FORUMS	165
COUNTY SITES OTHER THAN USGENWEB	165
STATE ARCHIVES ON THE INTERNET	166
FEDERAL LAND RECORDS ONLINE	166
LOCAL LAND RECORDS ONLINE.....	167
PROBATE RECORDS ONLINE	167
VITAL RECORDS ONLINE	168
CIVIL RECORDS ONLINE	169
ON-LINE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES.....	169
MICROFILM FOR COURTHOUSE RECORDS.....	169
FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY (FHL) AND THEIR MICROFILM.....	169
FINDING FAMILY HISTORY CENTERS	170
FHL CATALOG	170
ORDERING FHL MICROFILM	171
MICROFILM OTHER THAN FHL.....	173
MICROFILM PROBLEMS.....	173
LIBRARY GENEALOGICAL COLLECTIONS	173
FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY BOOKS	173
OTHER MAJOR LIBRARY COLLECTIONS	173
ADVANTAGES OF LIBRARY PREPARATION	175
USE WorldCat OCLC	177
LAW LIBRARIES FOR STATUTES.....	177
UNITED STATES STATUTES.....	177
NEWSPAPERS.....	178
OTHER FINDING AIDS	178
USING NUCMC.....	178
PERSI INDEX TO PUBLISHED ARTICLES.....	179
COUNTY INVENTORIES AND COUNTY GUIDES.....	180
WORK PROJECT ADMINISTRATION (WPA)	180
ORIGINAL COURTHOUSE RECORDS FOUND ELSEWHERE.....	181
UNUSUAL SITES.....	182
CHAPTER POINTS TO PONDER.....	182
.....	
Chapter 12: Strategies that Work	183
EXAMPLE 1: ALLOW ONE RECORD TO LEAD TO ANOTHER.....	183
EXAMPLE 2: LOCATING THE CHILDREN	185
EXAMPLE 3: LOCATING PARENTS	187
EXAMPLE 4: FOLLOWING THE SEPARATIONS AND DIVORCES	188
EXAMPLE 5: THE WILL IS MISSING	189
EXAMPLE 6: WIDENING THE SEARCH	190
STRATEGIES FOR LETTER WRITING.....	193
GENERAL RULES WHEN WRITING	193
STATING THE REQUEST CLEARLY.....	194
STRATEGIES FOR FINDING AFRICAN-AMERICAN RECORDS	195
STRATEGIES FOR "KNOWING" OUR ANCESTORS.....	197
KEEPING US GOING	198
THE SAGA OF A REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER	199
Resource References	201
Glossary	205
Index	213

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		
1-1	Illustration to determine county of search	2
1-2	List of independent cities in Virginia	3
1-3	Bookshelves and file boxes in a typical courthouse	4
1-4	Example of a one-page summary	6
1-5	7.5 Minute topographical map	6
1-6	County highway map	7
1-7	Example of "thorn"	8
1-8	Example of "ff"	8
1-9	Examples of tailed "s"	9
2-1	Russell index	17
2-2	Russell index enhanced	18
2-3	Russell index surname pages	19
2-4	Cott index	20
2-5	Variation of a Cott index	20
2-6	Graves index	21
3-1	Rectangular survey township after 1796	30
3-2	Rectangular survey township before 1796	30
3-3	General deed index	34
3-4	Illustration of "ss"	44
4-1	A plat map	48
4-2	Illustration of chains	49
4-3	A township grid for research purposes	58
4-4a, 4b, 4c	Three pages of a transcribed deed, annotated	61-63
5-1	General Index to estates	68
5-2	Estates index, and Proceedings dockets	68
5-3	Block in a proceedings docket	69
5-4	Example of a published index	71
5-5	Court Order Book entry	78
6-1	Example of initials for a signature mark	84
6-2	Summary of probate process	87
6-3	Petition for probate of will	88
6-4	Bond for an administratrix	89
6-5	Inventory of an estate	91
6-6	Final distribution in an estate	93
6-7	Court orders for an administration	95
6-8	Appointment of a guardian	96
7-1	Example of seals on three signatures	106
8-1	Example of a bond	114
8-2	A court docket	116
8-3	A docket entry	119
8-4	A writ	119
9-1	Example from a court order book	129
9-2	Civil Court process	130
9-3	A tax list	132
9-4	Occupation from a tax list	133
9-5, 9-6	A voting register	136
10-1	Marriage certificate and return	154
10-2, 10-3	Death register	158
11-1	Family History Library search criteria	170
11-2	Example of a Family History Library catalog search	172