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# ◊ Heritage Library News ◊

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Volume IV, Issue 4

October — December 2000

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*To: Members/Residents of  
Hilton Head Island  
From: Foundation President  
Tom Hanahan*

The Accommodations Tax Fund Committee recommended the Heritage Library Foundation receive a \$30,000 operating expense grant from the Town from the Accommodations Tax Fund. The Board of Directors and I were, needless to say, overjoyed by their recommendation.

The full Town Council will meet to consider all Committee recommendations on Tuesday, January 30th at 4:00 p.m. We would like to urge all residents of Hilton Head who are members of the Library to call, write or fax your letter to your Town Councilman and Mayor Tom Peeples and urge their support for the Committee's recommendation. We need this grant desperately in order to maintain our current space and house an ever growing expansion of books and materials. If the Heritage Library did not exist on Hilton Head Island we historians and genealogists would be forced to incur countless hours driving to and from other genealogical libraries not to mention the expense incurred as a result.

For your information and convenience listed below are the Mayor and our 6 Hilton Head Island Town Councilmen.

**Mayor Tom Peeples**

**Mayor Pro Tem Jim Carlin—Shipyard area**

**Councilman Ken Heitzke—Port Royal area**

**Councilman Earl Mallick—Sea Pines area**

**Councilman Bill Motell—Hilton Head Plantation and Indigo Run**

**Councilman Bill Ferguson—First Ward**

**Councilman Steve DeSimone—South Forest Beach area**

Letters may be addressed to the Mayor and Councilmen at #1` Town Center Court, Hilton Head Island, SC 29928. They may be faxed to 843-842-7728 with a cover sheet requesting they be copied and distributed to each Councilman's and the Mayor's mailbox. You may call to register your request to the Town at 341-4700. Thank you.

## **SC ARCHIVES & HISTORY CENTER OFFERS WORKSHOP ON TRACING AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY HISTORY**

The SC Department of Archives and History is offering a workshop on researching African American family history. *An Introduction to African American Genealogy* is scheduled Monday, February 12, 2001 at 6:00 p.m. at the SC Archives and History Center, 8301 Parklane Road in Columbia. There is a \$10 registration fee.

Archives and History staff member Alexia Helsley will explain how to get started in African American Genealogy, and researcher Lisa Randle will share her personal experience in tracing her family history. Examples of documents and resources will be on display.

Participants will take home the publications *African American Genealogical Research* and *Researching Family History*, both published by the Department of Archives and History.

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**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
GENEROUS SUPPORT THIS  
LAST YEAR!**

## **South Carolina's Eyewitnesses to the Revolution**

The South Carolina Department of Archives & History announces the release of its newest publication, *South Carolinians in the War for American Independence* by historian Alexia Jones Helsley. Web site: [www.state.sc.us/scdah](http://www.state.sc.us/scdah).

**HERITAGE LIBRARY**  
The Courtyard Building-Suite 300  
32 Office Park Road  
Hilton Head Island, SC 29938

Library Telephone — 843-686-6560

Fax — 843-341-6493

Hours —  
Monday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday  
9 AM - 2 PM  
(other hours by appointment)

Internet address — [www.heritagelib.org](http://www.heritagelib.org)

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Newsletter Editor —  
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## **HERITAGE LIBRARY FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**VP-Dir. of the Library—**  
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Betsy Wolf  
785-7841

(From the Research Cornerstones of Ancestry Magazine, May/June 2000, reprinted by permission of the author)

## CLUES IN THE COURTHOUSE

Whether our family search is a pastime to satisfy a new interest in our origins or a commitment to serious study, we all begin with family sources and move on to records from vital statistics offices, churches, and other organizations in places known to the family.

Our next step is to find what others have already uncovered, either through the Internet or in printed, microfilm, or CD-ROM material that we may purchase or consult in libraries.

Some researchers are lucky enough to find everything they want in those sources and may feel no need to confirm the information from original sources. Most of us, however, reach a point where the information to further our research wasn't recorded in family, church, or vital statistics records known to us, and was never copied and placed in a library. If the information exists, it is only as an original record, most likely in a courthouse somewhere.

### SEARCHING COURTHOUSE RECORDS

At the courthouse, we find records that were created for purposes completely unrelated to families. They were made to help the government to know who could be taxed and to what extent, who was eligible to vote, how crimes were dealt with, and how disputes among private parties were officially resolved. Any indexes to these records reflect the same governmental purposes, and they seldom name all the people listed in a document. How we use them to determine people's relationships often require us to creatively piece together fragmentary clues and bits of information from a variety of unrelated documents.

**HOW WE USE COURT RECORDS TO DETERMINE PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS OFTEN REQUIRES US TO CREATIVELY PIECE TOGETHER FRAGMENTARY CLUES FROM A VARIETY OF UNRELATED DOCUMENTS.**

The types of courthouse records most useful for family historians are the land records—most importantly the deeds reflecting land transfers, and the tax and assessment rolls—and the probate records relating to wills and estates of people who have died. In many jurisdictions, the recording office may also record other types of documents, like commissions of public officers, veterans' discharges or separation forms, corporate charters, or powers of attorney. As might be expected, courthouses have records of cases in the civil and criminal courts, with their trials, judgments, and sentences. Also, the original schedules of nineteenth century U.S. censuses, which were left in local custody, may be found in some courthouses, as may old voter registration rolls, which can serve as a partial substitute for a census.

Exactly what records are kept in each courthouse depends on the state or province where it is located, the time pe-

riod, and the individual practices of that particular county. Some records may have been transferred to central archives collections, with microfilms available for reference at the courthouse. Other courthouses keep the original records, but you may consult local libraries, state archives, or family history centers for microfilmed copies and indexes. We may be able to avoid long trips to distant courthouses by checking online library catalogs and archives collection descriptions first. A county level locality search of the Family History Library's catalog at <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> is a good place to start locating material available on microfilm.

### LAND RECORDS

Recorded copies of deeds and other written documents affecting land ownership are usually found in county courthouses. (A few jurisdictions may keep them at the town or city level.) These are copies made by a government officer to provide a permanent public record of the transaction. For earlier years, we find them handwritten and laboriously copied into bound record books.

More recently, technology has improved the process, and we see actual images of the original, made either photographically or digitally. In many counties, deeds and mortgage records for recent years can be viewed on a computer screen, either at the recording office or through the Internet.

Deeds have a number of informative items for family historians. They usually identify the current residence of the buyers and sellers and describe any family relationships among them.

Beyond that, they provide both the extent and location of the real estate and its value.

Boundary descriptions in deeds frequently name adjoining property owners. We can solve seemingly dead-end problems by collecting deeds to adjoining parcels and plotting the land ownership in the area. As with census research, identifying neighbors and their relationships can lead to solving the problem.

Tax and assessment rolls are among other records family historians find useful. Almost every county assesses land and other real estate for tax purposes. The assessment rolls, which list both resident and nonresident owners, and the tax rolls, which list those who actually paid the amount due each year, are particularly important for tracing heads of households during the ten year interval between federal censuses, or in replacing missing censuses. Tax maps showing the locations of properties may also be found at a courthouse. Real estate assessment and tax rolls, however, only cover property owners, not tenants, and it is not easy to distinguish the residents from nonresidents.

Many counties have other types of taxation and related tax rolls—tangible personal property (goods, furnishings, and equipment), intangible property (investments and bank ac-

(Continued on page 4)

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counts), and head, poll, or capitation taxes (assessed per person, usually on each free adult male). These records, where they exist, are useful because they include tenant householders and unmarried adult males who are not heads of household.

### **RECORDS OF DECEASED PROPERTY OWNERS**

Probate records are usually maintained at the county level and kept at the courthouse or by special probate districts. The records include copies of wills and letters appointing an executor or executrix, usually recorded in bound volumes after the will was proved authentic (probated). Other

**EXACTLY WHAT RECORDS ARE KEPT IN EACH COURTHOUSE DEPENDS ON ITS LOCATION, THE TIME PERIOD, AND THE COUNTY PRACTICES.**

documents account for and distribute the property as the will directed. These loose documents may be called probate files, probate documents, or probate packets. (In the past they were neatly wrapped and tied with red tape.)

Estates of people who died without wills (intestate) are distributed by an administrator or administratrix appointed under letters of administration. The records, similar to the documents in probate files, are called administration records, but are often informally included under the term “probate records,” even though no probate was involved. Many jurisdictions today use the term “personal representative” in place of the process-determined and gender-specific terms executor/executrix and administrator/administratrix, and the term “decedents’ estates” to include both probates and administrations.

In many localities, family historians or local societies have created every-name indexes to older wills. Decedents’ estate records are indexed only under the name of the person who owned the estate. Published will in-

dexes and abstracts are abbreviated so the originals, or images of them, must be consulted to assure significant information will not be overlooked or incorrectly copied.

When an every-name index has not been compiled, there is no option but to read each will for the period of interest. Many researchers pick out wills of people with surnames they already know, but they may overlook wills of parents who left bequests to married daughters or to maternal grandparents with unknown surnames.

### **COURT RECORDS**

Closely related to probate records are guardianship and real estate court proceedings. In some jurisdictions, the

same court that supervises probates handles these matters, and the records may be found in that office. In other places, a different court is involved, and the records will be found with the court’s clerk. Use the indexes to these records with the same caution that applies to probate records—usually only the subject of the guardianship and the original owner of land will be indexed.

Other courts deal with violations of criminal laws and disputes under civil law, and create records indexed under the names of the parties in each case. Papers filed in these cases will almost always be retained in the court files, as will the record of the judge’s decision, but transcripts of trial testimony are in the file only if one of the parties paid to have it transcribed.

Most local courthouses are home only to trial courts. Appeals courts are more likely to be found in state capitals or other central locations. Those courts don’t hold trials, but hear arguments about how the law was applied at the trial court level. Their files will contain briefs detailing the legal arguments of the parties, the opinion of the judge or judges, and the court’s decision.

The opinion of appeals courts usually

contain summaries of the facts as determined by the trial court, and comprise much of the material published in state and regional law report volumes. These can often be found in a county law library in the courthouse. Transcripts of the lawyers’ arguments are less likely to be found.

### **OTHER COURTHOUSE RECORDS**

The office that issues marriage licenses and preserves the certificates returned by the clergyman or officiator is often located in the courthouse. Records of marriage are also transmitted to state vital statistics offices. Either or both may issue certificates of marriage, and may include different items of information.

Other records found in courthouses will vary. Area guides, like *Ancestry’s Red Book* or *Everton’s Handy Book for Genealogists*, can be very helpful in preparing for a visit. No book, however, can substitute for the accumulated knowledge of courthouse clerks. Our skill in enlisting their cooperation may be essential to the success of our research. We are more likely to win their support by learning about the subject and the records ahead of time, and by framing focused questions so we don’t inflect long rambling accounts upon them.

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*Don Devine, a genealogical consultant from Wilmington, Delaware, is an attorney and archivist for the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington. A contributor to numerous genealogical publications, he holds Certified Genealogist and Certified Genealogical Instructor designations from the Board for Certification of Genealogists, of which he is also a trustee. He is a director of the National Genealogical Society and chairs its Standards Committee.*



## GENEALOGY ON THE NET

State vital records are now online with a wealth of information for researchers. Think of the time saved by finding your ancestor online. Visits these sites for vital record information.

**CALIFORNIA:** <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/ca/birth/search.cgi> — birth record database searchable by surname, given name, mother's maiden name, county, year or sex.. <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/ca/death/search.cgi> — This death database contains 9,366,786 names and is searchable by surname, given name, mother's maiden name, father's last name, birth year, death year, death place, and sex.

**ILLINOIS:** <http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/marriage.html>— A joint project of the State Archives and the State Genealogical Society, the index contains marriage information from as early as 1763.

**INDIANA:** Pre-1850 Indiana Marriage Information can be found <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/indiana/genealogy/mirr.html>

**KENTUCKY:** Various Kentucky vital records can be found at: <http://ukcc.uky.edu/~vitalrec/>

**MAINE:** Marriages in the State of Maine from 1892—1996 can be found at [http://thor.ddp.state.me.us/archives/plsql/archdev.Marriage\\_Archive.search\\_form](http://thor.ddp.state.me.us/archives/plsql/archdev.Marriage_Archive.search_form)

**OHIO:** Ohio Death Certificate index from 1913-1937 is at: <http://www.ohiohistory.org>, searchable by first name, last name, and county of death.

**TEXAS:** Texas Death Records (1964-1998), Divorce Records (1968-1997), Birth Summary Records (1926-1949), and Marriage Records for 1966-1997 are at: <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/tx/death/search.cgi>; <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/tx/divorce/search.cgi>; <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/tx/birth/general/search.cgi>; <http://userdb.rootsweb.com/tx/divorce/search.cgi>



### THREE NEW MEMBERS ADDED TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board has added three new members, Gwen G. Altstaetter, Cathy Speller and Arthur B. Elliott, Jr. have been named to fill the new slots added to the Board at its October meeting.

**Gwen G. Altstaetter** has been the Foundation's Bookstore Manager and Public Relations Director since the Library's inception in 1997. Gwen has an extensive administrative and executive background and retired as Executive Director, Job Advisory Services, Pittsburgh, PA.

**Cathy G. Speller** has been a Librarian in Charge and genealogist for the past 3 years. In addition Cathy developed the Library catalogue and initiated use of the CASPR System and has designed and developed other programs and services for the Library. Cathy has an extensive administrative background both in federal and local government agencies.

**Arthur B. Elliott** is an avid genealogist, educator and Lecturer. He serves as President, Dr. George Mosse Chapter Sons of the American Revolution, Hilton Head Island.



## SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AT THE HERITAGE LIBRARY

### "DIGITAL ARCHIVING"

Randy Holcombe, Instructor

February 21, 2001

3:00—4:30 p.m.

Randy will demonstrate new computer processes available to genealogists, and how to manage the digital process from document preparation to usage and storage of the finished product will be explained. A \$10.00 fee will be charged for handouts and refreshments.

### "PUBLISHING YOUR RESEARCH USING FAMILY TREE MAKER SOFTWARE"

Randy Holcombe, Instructor

March 21, 2001

3:00—5:00 p.m.

Randy will teach us the steps to self publication from data entry of our families to binding. A fee of \$10.00 will cover the costs of handouts and refreshments.

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## BOOK REVIEW

By Cathy Speller

### Edgefield County, South Carolina: Deed Books 34 and 35

(2000), by Carol Wells

134 pp.; full name index; soft cover; \$17.50) + \$4.00 S&H.

Order from Heritage Books, Inc., 1540E Pointer Ridge Road, Bowie, Maryland 20716; 1-800-398-7709; WWW.HERITAGEBOOKS.COM.

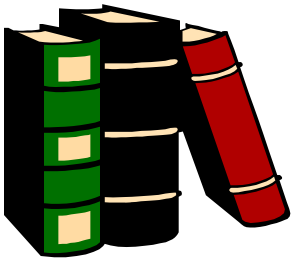
The compiler continues her abstracts of Edgefield South Carolina Deed Books with the 8th volume. The deeds are presented in the original page number order. Place names listed in the book are South Carolina unless otherwise noted. In addition to full name surnames in the index, other states are listed, as are counties and towns. There is also a name index under the heading SLAVES. Ms. Wells states that original source records should be checked since the microfilm copies are faded and because of the similarity of some letters. A list of abbreviations is included in the front of the book.

The book covers deeds recorded between 1817 and 1819, but some deeds date back to the mid 1700s. Information included in some deeds in addition to Grantor/Grantee information is adjoining land information; inheritance information including spouse and children; other parties in lawsuits; location of residence when in another district, state, or country. The book contains many genealogical connections to the Grantor/Grantee. This book is certainly useful to anyone with ancestors connected to Edgefield County during this time frame.

## VOLUNTEERS HONORED

The Heritage Library  
Foundation, Inc.  
Suite 300  
32 Office Park Road  
Hilton Head Island SC  
29928-4640

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### In This Issue...

Clues in the Courthouse . . . Special Presentations in February & March . . . Calendar

### CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

#### 2001

*February 2—3*

*February 13*

*February 21*

*March 13*

*March 21*

*March 24*

*May 16—19*

*September 17—23*

*Dallas, TX: GENTECH 2001*

*Hilton Head Island Genealogical Society 10:00 a.m. at the Heritage Library*

*Hilton Head Island: "Digital Archiving" by Randy Holcombe, Heritage Library  
3-4:30 p.m. Fee \$10.00.*

*Hilton Head Island Genealogical Society 10:00 a.m. at the Heritage Library*

*Hilton Head Island: "Publishing Your Research Using Family Tree Maker Software", by Randy Holcombe, Heritage Library, 3-5:00 p.m. Fee \$10.00.*

*Raleigh, NC —NGS Regional Workshop*

*NGS Conference in the States*

*Dublin, Ireland: Fourth Irish Genealogical Congress — Trinity College*