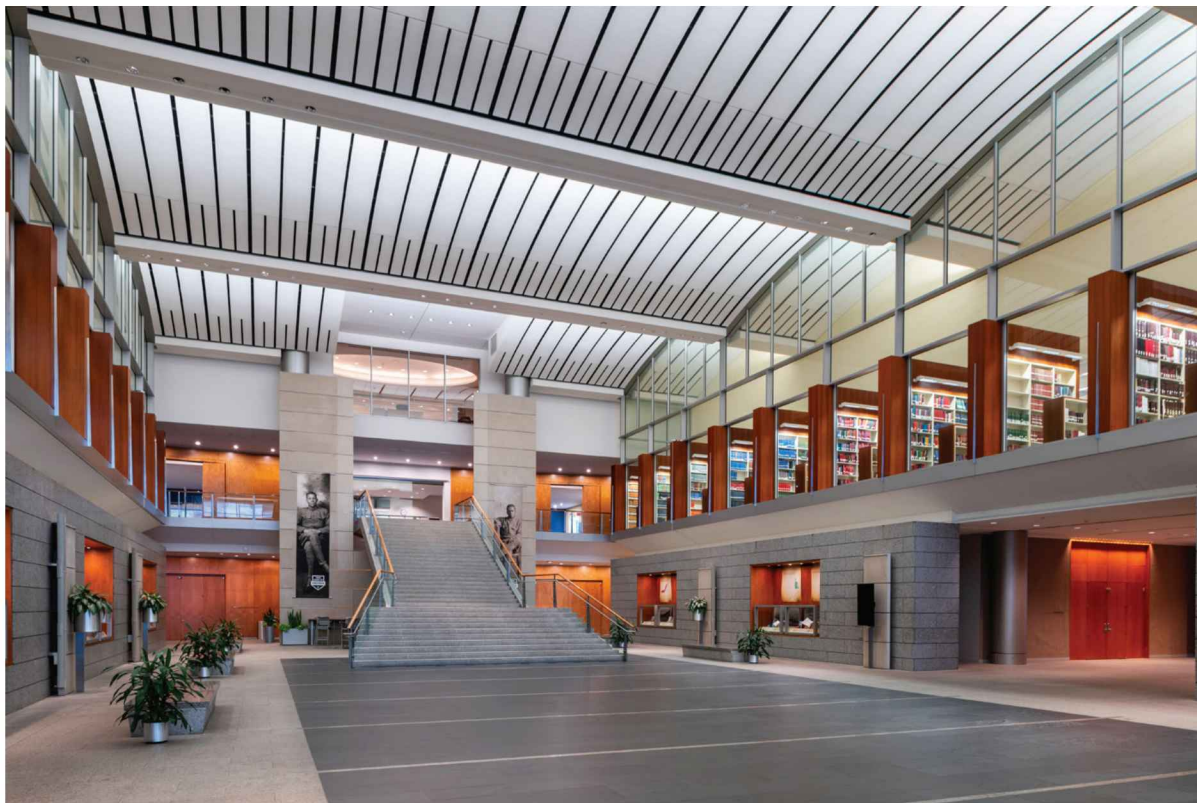# The Library of Virginia Welcomes Researchers

Virginia Dunn

First floor of the Library of Virginia, with a partial view of a reading room on the second floor. Courtesy of LVA.

Looking for that long lost Virginia ancestor? The Library of Virginia is the place! The Greater Richmond Convention Center, the planned site of the NGS 2020 Family History Conference, is located three short blocks from the Library.

The Library was established in 1823 by the General Assembly of Virginia to manage the Commonwealth's books and official records. Its rich collection of genealogical resources, many dating back to the colonial period, draws researchers from around the world. Approximately 70 percent of visitors are genealogists. There are 125 million archival items and fifty thousand reels of microfilm in the Library's collection.[1]

Published and archival collections

The Library's Local History and Genealogy Room contains published abstracts and indexes of Virginia and West Virginia county and city records as well as general Virginia indexes and historical periodicals. Indexes of historical records of contiguous states are held in the East Reading Room on the research floor and in the closed stacks area.

Virginia Dunn has worked at the Library of Virginia for twenty-two years and is the manager of the Archives & Library Reference Services Department. A native of Nebraska, she received a BA in history from the University of Nebraska and a master's of library science from the University of Missouri. She moved to Virginia in 1988 and spent ten years as the college archivist at Lynchburg College before moving to Richmond.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 16 September 2020.

1. "Genealogical Records at the Library of Virginia" (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/generesearch.pdf) provides an overview. This link may change when research guides are updated.

Provided with permission of the author, Virginia Dunn, and the National Genealogical Society.

The Library is a depository for printed Virginia and federal documents, including many published by the United States Congress. Library staff members can assist in a search for these governmental records.

Researchers can view personal papers, church records, and original city, county, and state records in the Archives Research Room. Private papers related to Virginia include family papers, family Bible records, genealogical notes and charts, Virginia business records, and organizational records. The Archives Research Room has a two-hour limit during times of heavy usage.

Microfilm collection

The Library's collection of Virginia county and city court cases, deeds, wills, and marriage records on microfilm is heavily used by genealogists. The microfilm collection includes Virginia newspapers back to the late 1700s and other historical Virginia records such as governors' executive papers, land patents and grants, military service records, and personal property and land tax books.

Researchers working with microfilm at the Library of Virginia. Courtesy of LVA.

"Using County and City Court Records" at https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/rn6_countycity.pdf describes Virginia's local records (not just court records).[2] "A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm" at https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local provides an inventory of microfilmed local records, arranged by locality and category. The lists give reel numbers and indicate if reels can be borrowed through interlibrary loan. For information on interlibrary loan, see https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/ill.php.

Microfilm reader-scanners and most of the microfilmed records are located in the Library's West Reading Room on the second floor. Many of the microfilmed newspapers are in the closed stacks area and library staff members can request them for patrons to use on the research floor. Scanners are assigned on a first come, first served basis, with a one-hour time limit if others are waiting during heavy usage times (such as a conference).

Partial view of the Local History & Genealogy Room, Library of Virginia. Courtesy of LVA.

The Special Collections Department houses maps, architectural drawings, rare books, photographs, and ephemera. Maps were part of the Library of Virginia's original collection and today there are sixty-six thousand maps in various collections. Twelve thousand maps are housed in the historical map collection. It includes general historical maps (manuscript, printed, and photocopies of Virginia maps from other collections), special groups of historical maps, and United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangles, drawings, and plans. Maps are available in Special Collections by advance appointment.

---

2. Research guides and bibliographies are being updated to a new format, so the links may change.

Library website and catalog

Start in For the Public, a section of the Library's home page (https://www.lva.virginia.gov), to prepare for a visit and begin research. Click on Using the Collections (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp) to see links to the collections by topic.

Once a topic is chosen, available guides or online indexes are displayed, including bibliographies and descriptive research notes created by staff. Some of the most popular topics are African American and Native American Resources; Births, Death, Marriages; County and City Research, including Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky; Maps and Architecture; Military Service; and Newspapers and Magazines. The topics may have links to digital collections on other parts of the website.

Using the Collections also features a topical listing of databases and eBooks. The Library subscribes to a number of commercial historical and genealogical databases, including Ancestry Institution (the institutional version of Ancestry), Fold3, American History Collection, and Social Explorer. All visitors may use these databases while in the building. Virginia residents may search some of the databases from home using their library card or account, but licensing agreements do not allow remote access by non-Virginia residents.

A link to the Library's online catalog is on the top right of the home page. Here researchers can search for books and journals, archival resources, and special collections items such as broadsides and maps. A library catalog user guide is available (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/GettingStarted_primo.pdf).

Some of the digitized collections are also available in the online catalog. "What am I Searching/Not Searching?" at https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/searching_notsearching.asp contains a full list of the digitized indexes and collections in the LVA catalog.

Digital collections

The Library has digitized a number of collections that appear in either Virginia Memory (https://virginiamemory.com) or the online catalog. Both may be accessed from the Library's home page. In Virginia Memory (linked in For the Public), click on Digital Collections and select collections by topic or in an A to Z list.

For tips on searching digital collections, review https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/lva_digital_discovery.pdf. The main page of each database has a description of the collection. Three collections are highlighted below.

Chancery Records Index: A chancery court was a court of equity, and its records can include valuable historical and genealogical information. About twenty years ago, the Library of Virginia embarked on a multi-year project to process and index chancery court records. Records are in one of three formats: original (served in the Archives Research Room), on microfilm, or digital. The Chancery Records Index and a list of indexed and/or digitized locality records are available at https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/chancery.

Virginia Chronicle: A historical archive of Virginia newspapers, Virginia Chronicle provides access to full-text searching and digitized images of various newspaper pages. A list of titles and dates is available on the front page of the database. Anyone can search the database but a free account, separate from a library account/card, is needed to view the images. Go to https://virginiachronicle.com for more information.

virginiachronicle
LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Home   Search   Titles   Dates   Places   Map   Text Correction   Blog   Help

FEATURED IN THIS COLLECTION

Farm Bureau News 1 September 1995

SEARCH THE COLLECTION

Search the collection

EXPLORE OUR NEW FEATURES
See the Help section for more details.

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

Virginia Chronicle is a historical archive of Virginia newspapers, providing free acce to full text searching and digitized images of over a million newspaper pages.

This collection contains 179,132 issues comprising 1,321,741 pages and 183,885 articles.

In addition to the growing collection of newspapers found at Virginia Chronicle, the

Selected List of Digital Collections in Virginia Memory

DIGITAL COLLECTIONS   READING ROOM   EXHIBITIONS

- Civil War Map Project
- Cohabitation Registers
- Confederate Disability Applications and Receipts
- Confederate Pension Rolls, Veterans and Widows
- Dunmore's War (Virginia Payrolls/ Public Service Claims, 1775)
- Legislative Petitions Digital Collection
- Lost Records Localities Index
- Map Collections
- Rare Book Digital Collection
- Revolutionary War Bounty Warrants
- Revolutionary War Rejected Claims
- Revolutionary War Virginia State Pensions
- Robert E. Lee Camp Confederate Soldiers' Home Applications for Admission
- The World at War: Library of Virginia WWI Collections
- Virginia Colonial Records Project
- Virginia Historical Inventory
- Virginia Land Office Patents and Grants/Northern Neck Grants and Surveys
- Virginia Yearbooks Digital Project
- War of 1812 Bicentennial Collection
- World War I History Commission Questionnaires
- WPA Life Histories Collection

Virginia Untold: The Virginia Untold database improves access to pre-1865 African American history and genealogy. As an ongoing project, local and state archival records related to African Americans are being indexed and digitized. For a complete description and information regarding search strategies, see https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan.

Access to the collections

Only a small fraction of the materials at the Library has been digitized or indexed online, so visiting the Library is the best way to make full use of the resources.

While many reference materials are available for browsing, most of the Library's printed collections—including family history materials, periodicals, and microfilm of most newspapers—are located in closed stacks. A library account or card is not needed to search in the online catalog. Closed stacks materials can be requested and sent to the circulation area once patrons have a library card or account.

Closed stacks materials must be checked out from the Circulation Desk. Much of the material is non-circulating and must be used in the Library and returned on the same day. If a book is circulating, Virginia residents may check it out for twenty-eight days. Non-residents must use all books in the Library and return them to the Circulation Desk that day. Upon request, the staff can hold materials overnight at the desk for easy check-out the next day.

A valid Library of Virginia card is needed to check out materials from the closed stacks and to use the Archives Research Room and the Special Collections Research Room. The card doubles as a copy card. Funds can be added to the account using cash (bills only, no coins) or a MasterCard or VISA credit or debit card. A photo identification card with a current address is necessary to obtain a card. If the address on the photo identification card isn't current, researchers can present an official piece of mail or utility bill that shows the current address.

Before visiting the Library, Virginia residents may apply for an account online, which then allows remote access to some of the Library's subscription databases. A physical card is issued during a visit to the Library. Non-residents must apply for a card in person and can only use subscription databases while visiting the Library.

Copies and scans

The Library has three overhead black and white scanners that can be used to scan pages from books to a USB drive. Scanning is free and USB drives are available for purchase at the Circulation Desk. There are also three self-service photocopiers. Self-service photocopies cost twenty-five cents per copy.

Users can print microfilm copies using funds on their library cards. Printouts are on 11" by 17" paper and cost fifty cents per page. Alternatively, researchers can use a USB drive and save images free of charge. The default file for a saved image is a PDF but staff can change it to a JPG upon request.

Scanners are not allowed in the Archives Research Room, but users may take photographs of materials (no flash). Using a researcher's library card, archivists can make photocopies of loose papers for fifty cents per page, up to twenty-five copies per day. Additional copy orders are sent to the Library's Photo Lab at fifty cents per page plus shipping and handling. The archivists cannot copy fragile or bound materials on the photocopier but can write an order for the Photo Lab staff to make copies at two dollars per page plus shipping and handling. Copy orders are mailed out later. The Photo Lab can make digital copies at twenty-five dollars per image.

Visiting the Library

At the time of this writing, the Library is open on a limited basis by appointment only and follows strict COVID-19 protocols. Check the Library's website for updates.

Library of Virginia

800 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219-8000

Tuesday to Friday, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, by appointment only (as of December 2020). Call 804-692-3800 to make an appointment. No appointments will be made for the week of the conference until closer to that time.
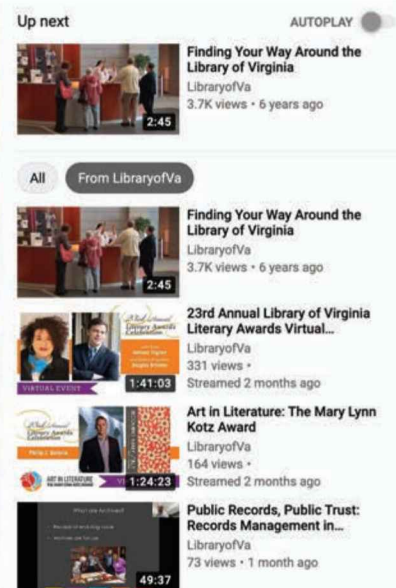
Contact:
- Archives Reference Services – 804-692-3888
- Library Reference Services – 804-692-3777
- Special Collections – 804-692-3703

Use the Contact Us page (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/about/contact) to email the staff with questions about collections.

Websites:
- Library, https://www.lva.virginia.gov
  For the Catalog, click Catalog at top right and enter search term
- Virginia Memory, https://virginiamemory.com
- Blog: *The Uncommonwealth*, https://uncommonwealth.virginiamemory.com

---

It's a good idea to review the Library's policies and guidelines at https://www.lva.virginia.gov/about/policies/default.asp. The Library has a collection of videos on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/user/LibraryofVa. Detailed guides to parts of

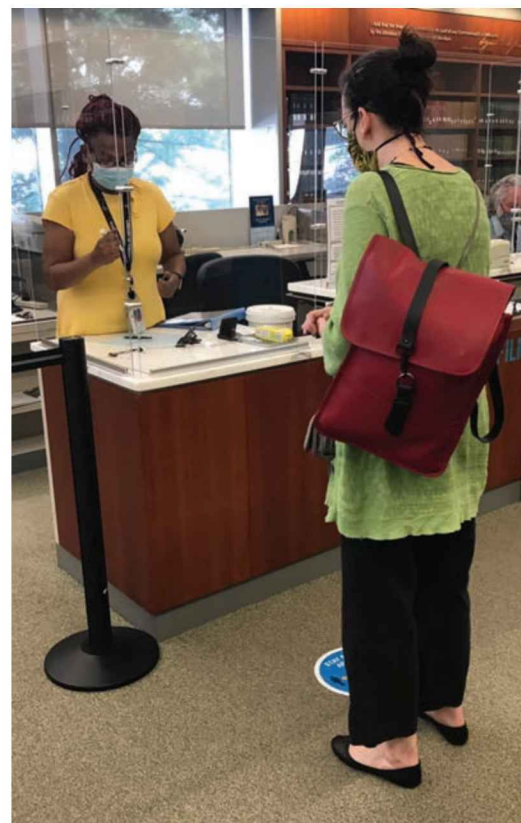the collections are at https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/bibguides.htm#res.

The Library does not have a café or food vending machines. Food and drinks are not allowed on the second floor, but patrons may bring a lunch or snacks to eat on the first floor. The Virginia Shop on the first floor offers books, gifts, and a few snacks. For information about parking, directions, and a link to the Library's floor plan, see https://www.lva.virginia.gov/about/visit.asp.

A valuable resource at the Library of Virginia is the public services staff. The staff can help determine resources to try to solve a genealogical puzzle, suggest reference books, order materials from the closed stacks, and assist with the microfilm scanners and other equipment in the research rooms. Prior to a research trip, genealogists may contact the staff to ask for advice, by emailing or calling.

Conclusion

LVA's website (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/about/default.asp) summarizes the value of the repository. "The Library of Virginia houses the most comprehensive collections of materials on Virginia government, history, and culture available anywhere. The collections illustrate the rich and varied past of the Commonwealth, documenting the lives of Virginians whose deeds are known to all and those of ordinary citizens whose accomplishments are the foundation of Virginia's heritage."

Staff member assisting a researcher. Courtesy of the Library of Virginia.