

NGS 2021 Family History Conference: Research Opportunities in Richmond, Virginia

Robin Dwyer-Maurice and Teresa Kelley

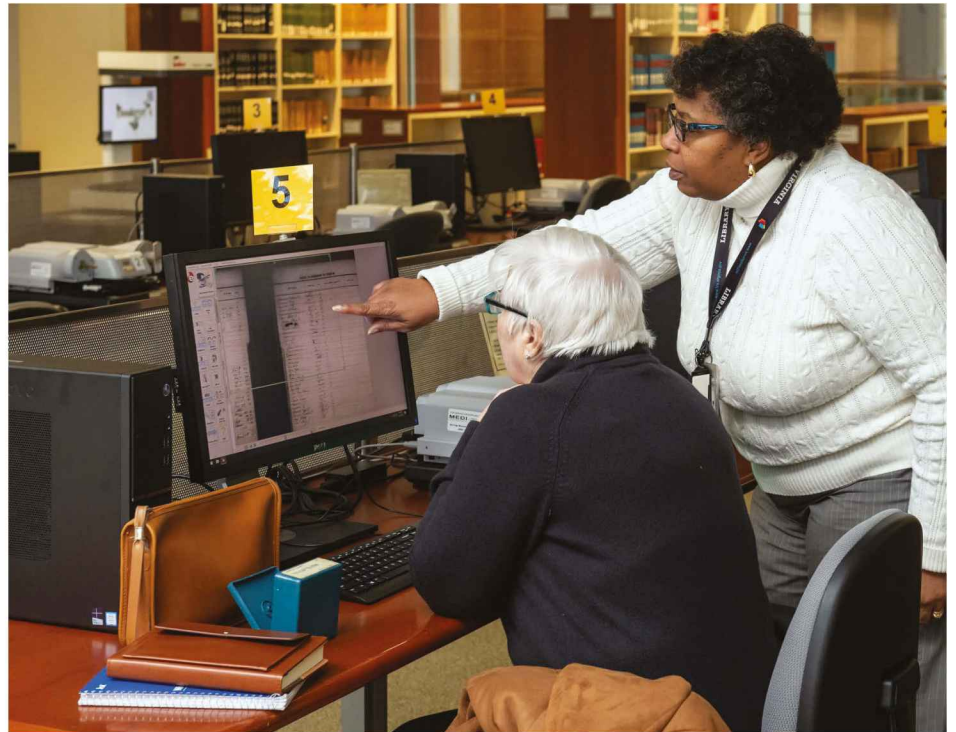
Richmond, Virginia, is the site of the NGS 2021 Family History Conference from 19 to 22 May. Repositories in and around Richmond offer unique resources just waiting to be discovered by those with Virginia roots or an interest in Virginia history.

Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia (LVA) is located three short blocks from the conference venue, the Greater Richmond Convention Center. Founded in 1823, it houses the most comprehensive collection in the world for the study of Virginia history, culture, and government. Resources include state, county, and local government records, newspapers, Bible records, personal papers, business records, and many other items of genealogical interest.

For an introduction to the Library and guides to specific research topics, see “Using the Collections” (https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/using_collections.asp). Guides and bibliographies on specific topics such as African American and Native American resources, women’s history, Virginia Land Office patents and grants, military service, tax records, and Virginia history and culture are also available online (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides>).

LVA has an extensive microfilm collection of state and local government records. A list of microfilm available for each county and city in Virginia is online (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local>). Many newspapers are also available on microfilm. A bibliography of American newspapers inventoried by the Virginia Newspaper Project is searchable by county and city (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/vnp>).



Tina Miller, Library of Virginia access services manager, assists a patron using a microfilm reader. Courtesy of the Library of Virginia.

Robin Dwyer-Maurice and **Teresa Kelley** are publicity volunteers for the Virginia Genealogical Society’s 2021 Host Committee. Teresa, a Virginia native and the past president of VGS, recently retired from federal government service. She now focuses on increasing her working knowledge of DNA and its uses in combination with traditional genealogical research. Robin, also a Virginia native and a member of VGS, happens to be Teresa’s sister. She comes by her research skills from a long career with a local public safety agency. Together they tackle pesky brick walls that get in the way of their research.

Numerous digital collections are available for searching from the comfort of home including “Unknown No Longer,” which contains biographical details of enslaved Virginians from unpublished historical records in LVA’s collections; Virginia Yearbooks Digital Project; Travel Brochures Digital Collection; Virginia newspapers; photo collections; and the Chancery Records Index. The Chancery Records Index contains 272,000 indexed cases and nearly eleven million digital images of chancery causes (<https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/chancery>).



Students analyzing primary sources in the Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC). Courtesy of VMHC.

Virginia Museum of History and Culture

Formerly the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC) was founded in 1831. This repository focuses on private materials encompassing four centuries of Virginia’s history. It houses a collection of nearly nine million items that includes books, newspapers, family and personal papers, business and organizational records, genealogical materials, maps, photographs, paintings, and postcards. Along with a research repository, the museum offers ongoing exhibitions. Several exhibitions are available to explore digitally

including “The Story of Virginia” (<https://www.virginiahistory.org/exhibitions>).

VMHC’s Library Catalog contains entries for items in the library’s collection, and the Museum Objects Catalog inventories items such as decorative arts, furniture, photographs, glass plate negatives, paintings, postcards, and militaria (<https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections/search-collections>). The Museum Objects Catalog also houses the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS) Image Collection of items from the American Civil War Museum. The CMLS collection has approximately 6,300 items including daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, cartes-de-visite, albumen prints, and cabinet cards. In partnership with the American Civil War Museum, VMHC staff digitized these items to provide better access.

Other Richmond repositories

Boatwright Memorial Library at the University of Richmond has among its collections the holdings of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society since 1876. A research appointment may be required (<http://baptistheritage.org>).

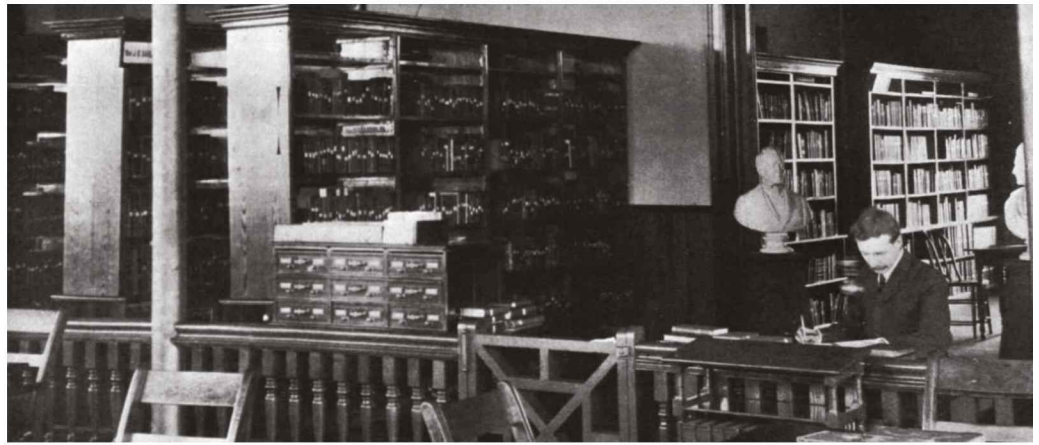
The Valentine, located at 1015 East Clay Street, was founded in 1898 as a museum dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting Richmond’s history. Its archives include papers related to local families, businesses, and organizations

as well as one million photographs documenting people, places, and events in the Richmond area. Online resources include a collections database and indexes to the photograph, manuscript, and vertical file collections (<https://thevalentine.org/collections/archives>).

Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR), located at 2801 Kensington Avenue, is the State Historic Preservation Office. Although not genealogical in nature, its collections contain genealogical information. VDHR’s research library has a specialized selection of books,

theses, dissertations and photographs associated with Virginia history, county histories, historic preservation, architecture, and archaeology. VDHR is the principal repository for Virginia historic survey and archaeological reports, many digitized and available online (<https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/archive/special-collections>). A database of Virginia's historical highway markers with pictures is also online (<https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/highway-markers>). Spend some time exploring this often overlooked resource. You may be surprised by what you discover.

Virginia Union University, located at 1500 N. Lombardy Street, is a small, not-for-profit, historically Black college established by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1865 to provide training skills, opportunities, and literacy to the newly emancipated population of Richmond and Virginia. Originally called Richmond Theological School for Freedmen, later it formed a "union" with three other institutions: Wayland Seminary, Hartshorn Memorial (Women's) College, and Storer College. The L. Douglas Wilder Library's Archives and Special Collections Department has a rare book collection of twelve hundred volumes, with an



Virginia Union University library, circa 1908. "A Puzzle in Parian," Virginia Union University (VUU) Archives & Special Collections blog, 21 September 2017 (<https://vuuarchives.wordpress.com>). Courtesy of VUU Archives.

emphasis on African American children's books of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other collections feature the legacy of African American preachers; history and theology of African American sacred and secular music; African history and slave culture; and African American history and sociology. Appointments are required (<https://www.vuu.edu/library/archives-special-collections>).

Nearby repositories

Three major repositories within an hour's drive of Richmond are well worth the trip.

Earl Gregg Swem Library: Named for Earl Gregg Swem, college librarian from 1920 to 1944, this library is located on the historic campus of the College of William and Mary at 400 Landrum Drive in Williamsburg. The Special Collections Research Center on the first floor of Swem Library houses the university archives, rare books, manuscripts, business records, personal and family papers, and church records. Swem's collections are rich in genealogical and historical materials covering eastern and Southside Virginia. A genealogical research guide describing the collections and a searchable catalog are available online (<https://guides.libraries.wm.edu/genealogy2>).

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library: While in Williamsburg, visit the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library which is part of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (<https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/locations/john-d-rockefeller-jr-library>). The library contains one hundred thousand items including rare books, original manuscripts from the seventeenth to



"Earl Gregg Swem (1870-1965)," William & Mary Libraries ([https://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Earl_Gregg_Swem_\(1870-1965\)](https://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/Earl_Gregg_Swem_(1870-1965))). CC BY-SA 3.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>).

twentieth centuries, eighteenth-century American and British newspapers, and maps with a geographic focus on Williamsburg and the Virginia Peninsula. The library also houses the files of Colonial Williamsburg researchers and the microfilmed “York County Project Index.” A valuable resource for those with interest in families from the Virginia Peninsula, it contains an index and abstract of York County court records from 1633 to 1815 (<https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/library/materials/topics/york-county-records>). To explore the collections available at the library and its online digitized resources, collection guides, and periodical indexes, visit <https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org>.

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections

Library: Located at 170 McCormick Road, Charlottesville, on the University of Virginia campus, this library holds more than sixteen million objects. Of particular interest to Virginia researchers are personal and family papers, Bible records, maps, rare books, photographs, and other historical resources focused on central Virginia as well as other areas of the state. A guide to general research in UVA libraries (<https://guides.lib.virginia.edu/genealogy>) includes tips for searching Virgo, the library’s online catalog.

Finding aids

Finding aids for many collections in these repositories are available through Virginia Heritage (<https://vaheritage.org>). To search a specific repository’s collections, use the advanced search feature and choose the repository from the drop-down list.

Washington, DC repositories

Richmond is only two hours away from the National Archives, Daughters of the American Revolution Research Library, Library of Congress, Smithsonian Libraries, and Society of the Cincinnati Library in Washington, DC.

Conclusion

Virginia has much to offer genealogical researchers as demonstrated by the vast records collections in these repositories. The facilities named are just a few within walking or driving distance of the NGS 2021 Family History Conference location.

We look forward to meeting you in May 2021 for the NGS Family History Conference where you can further your knowledge by learning from experts, make contact with potential family members, and see what your Virginia ancestors may have left behind! 🌳



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