

# Barbara's Book Club at the Virginia Genealogical Society

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*A Researcher's Guide to Virginia's Historical Records*

## **Chapter 3: Company, Colony, and Commonwealth** (pages 47–114)

## **Chapter 4: Local Government Records** (pages 115–168)

These questions are designed for reflection on Barbara Vines Little's *A Researcher's Guide to Virginia's Historical Records*, Chapters 3–4. As you read, consider how Virginia's evolving governmental structures and local record-keeping systems shape what survives, where records can be found, and how understanding these systems can strengthen your genealogical research and the conclusions you reach. Consider keeping a research journal to capture insights or questions that may emerge so you can share them at our meeting.

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### **1. The Roots of the Records** (pages 47–114)

Virginia's records were created under multiple governing structures—from the Virginia Company of London to the Commonwealth. How does identifying which government was in power at a given time help you understand what records might exist, where they might be found, and what circumstances they were created within?

### **2. Bits and Pieces** (pages 47–114)

Early records from Virginia are sparse and uneven. How should research strategies from this period differ from those used for later post-Revolution or nineteenth-century Virginia research? What kinds of indirect or contextual evidence become more important?

### **3. Here and There** (pages 57–63)

Projects like Virginia's Colonial Records Project (VCRP) have gathered copies of records scattered far beyond Virginia. How does understanding the history of record survival and retrieval change the way you search for colonial-era information? Have you made any assumptions about missing records that might need to be reconsidered?

### **4. On the Hunt** (pages 47–168)

Virginia's government records live across multiple collections (and repositories). How has your new understanding of Virginia's shifting jurisdictions changed how you approach using the Library of Virginia's catalogs, research guides, and digital collections? Has your study of these chapters helped you discover a new Library of Virginia resource you weren't familiar with already?

### **5. The Rule of Law** (pages 47–168)

Virginia laws shaped how people lived, owned property, and even worshipped. How can a better understanding of the legal environment of a given time and place—whether found in statutes, session laws, or other legal compilations—help you better interpret an ancestor's actions?

## **6. Follow the Signatures** (pages 89–100)

Various types of legislative petitions often capture entire communities. How might these documents allow you to place an ancestor within a social, religious, or political network? Have you found an ancestor in a Virginia petition?

## **7. Full Circle** (pages 93–99)

Petitions were created, submitted, referred, acted upon and archived. How does understanding a petition’s journey affect your understanding of them? Are there any clues that might be missed if you only consider the final document?

## **8. A County’s Kin** (pages 123–134)

Virginia’s county formations and subsequent divisions created parent-child type relationships between jurisdictions. How often do you trace a county’s “genealogy” before beginning research? What risks do you face when this step is skipped?

## **9. Says Who?** (pages 137–146)

County governments operated through clerks, justices, constables, coroners, and surveyors (among others). How does identifying the office responsible for a record help you understand its purpose, reliability, location, and survival?

## **10. Land-Ho!** (pages 155–160)

Land could be purchased and passed through many processes including grants, land transfers, license, and title changes. How can understanding these processes help follow land forward or backward in time more fully?

## **Closing Thoughts**

- Were there any assumptions you previously made about Virginia records that these chapters challenged?
- What new record groups or repositories have you discovered?
- Will your approach to local government records change as a result of what you’ve learned?
- Has anything you’ve learned from these chapters changed how you might approach a search for records the next time you begin a new Virginia research problem?