

## 1 **Courthouse Research**

Introduction

## 2 **What may be found at the Courthouse?**

- Vital records for birth, marriage, and death
- Land records – deeds, mortgages, plat maps, bill of sales
- Estate and Probate records
- Guardianships of minors and the incapacitated
- Tax records – personal and real property
- Naturalization records
- Divorces
- Civil and criminal records
- Insanity records
- Pauper and poorhouse records

## 3 **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- You need to correctly identify the county
  - Example of the problems you can face:
    - Effingham, South Carolina: It has been in the following counties and districts: Williamsburg District, Cheraw District, Darlington County, Marion County, Williamsburg County, and finally Florence County.
  - There are websites you can use to figure out what county you need to go to find the information you want.
    - <http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html>
    - [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United\\_States](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States)
  - If you are not internet savvy, there are books out there which can help you locate the correct county.
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## 4 **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- One of the best books out there is titled "The Handybook for Genealogists." The edition I have is the eleventh edition. I think there may be a newer edition out there but this was the newest I could find.
  - C:\books\Master Handybook CD.pdf
    - This book gives you everything you need to know about a particular state and where records are located to begin your research.
- Make sure that the records you interested in still exist. Many counties are known as "burn counties." No, this does not have to do with only Sherman and his merry band of marauders and their search and destroy mentality. Many courthouses have been burned over the years
  - In South Carolina there is also an internet site which gives you the basic information on the counties and which counties were burned at one time or another
  - <http://www.scgenealogy101.com/county-records/>

## 5 **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- Here are examples of when the some of the courthouses burned in Georgia:
  - Baker County: Flood - 1925, 1929.

- Baldwin County: Fire - 1861.
- Bartow County: Originally Cass County. Courthouse destroyed by enemy fire during War Between the States in the 1860's.
- Bulloch County: Fire - 1864.
- Burke County: Fire - 1825, 1856.
- Calhoun County: Fire - 1888, 1920.
- Carroll County: Fire - 1927.
- Charlton County: County site then at Traders Hill. Destroyed by fire in 1877. Present site fire 19 February 1928.
- Cherokee County: Fire - 1865, 1928.
- Clayton County: Fire - 1864.
- Clinch County: Fire - 1856, 1867.
- Cobb County: Fire - 1864.
- Coffee County: Fire - 1898, 1938.
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6  **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- Just because the courthouse burned doesn't necessarily mean that all of the records are lost. Ask.
- Call before you go. Some of the items you are looking for may not be in the courthouse. An example: Darlington County only modern records i.e. 1900 forward are located in the courthouse. The older records are contained in the Darlington Historical Commission on Hewitt Street.
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7  **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- 1  • Call ahead – Why?
  - Security rules;
  - Hours and access to documents;
  - Equipment you can use;
  - Charges for copies; and
  - Document location and how they are kept.
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8  **Before you go - preparation is the key!**

- What you should take with you:
  - Map of the area;
  - Magnifying glass;
  - Pencils (many places do not allow pens);
  - Notebook;
  - A copy of the portion of the family tree which pretains to the family researching at this particular courthouse;
  - Camera or smart phone; and
  - White cotton gloves.

9  **Tips for courthouse research**

- Review the National Genealogical Society's Guidelines for Using Records Repositories and Libraries – it is a courtesy guide.

- [http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/guidelines\\_for\\_using\\_records\\_repositories\\_and\\_libraries](http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/guidelines_for_using_records_repositories_and_libraries)
  - Consider starting your trip at the local library or historical society.
  - Record books are large and heavy and there will not be anyone there to help you with them. Take someone with you to help you move the books
  - Wear long sleeves and comfortable shoes.
  - The dust is thick so bring medication if you have allergies.
- 10  **What may be found at the Courthouse?**
- Vital records for birth, marriage, and death
  - Land records – deeds, mortgages, plat maps, bill of sales
  - Estate and Probate records
  - Guardianships of minors and the incapacitated
  - Tax records – personal and real property
  - Naturalization records
  - Divorces
  - Civil and criminal records
  - Insanity records
  - Pauper and poorhouse records
- 11  **When the clerk asks “May I help you?”**
- Focus on what you want to see, not on why you want to see it.
    - The employees at the courthouse are not genealogist – they are there to do a job.
    - Don’t tell them your story. They really don’t need to know it. If you tell them your story, you will see their eyes glaze over and then you have lost them.