



Courthouse Records Preservation

By Warren Spruill

The Night Group of the Tuscaloosa Genealogy Society has taken on a project to preserve the 19th century Tuscaloosa County court records. This is a status report *on* where we stand at the end of 2008. So far, we have moved 75 books out of the Court House. These books have been cleaned, inventoried, assessed and catalogued. Another step required repagination of each bound volume. This was necessary because the page numbers were not always consecutive and sadly, some of the pages have been cut out of the original volume.

About two weeks ago, Jan Hutchison, the chair of the Preservation Committee photographed each page in three volumes of tax records from 1824-5. These pages were then put on six CDs and distributed to volunteers for indexing. There are 20 pages on each CD. Once indexed, the pages will be returned to the Project Administrator and added to the Master Index. These three volumes will serve as a Beta test for our indexing procedures. We are striving for accuracy and consistency in our indexing. So far, we are pleased with the results of this initial indexing.

To back up a little, we first started moving these volumes out of the CourtHouse in the fall of 2007. Just recently we have had to move our operation. Our activity was beginning to interfere with our landlord's other activities. Also, due to security, we could not work, unless the landlord's employees were on the premises. Obviously, this impaired our use of volunteers during the evening hours and on the weekend. The Alabama Credit Union has provided us with an office suite that is large enough for our activities. This space is provided rent-free and includes utilities. Our Society did not have sufficient funds to cover rent. So without this generous offer we would have been in a quandary. This Saturday, we completed the move to our new location.

The Clerk of the Circuit Court, Ms. Magaria Bobo is the custodian of these records. She has been extremely cooperative in working with us. She inspected and approved our new location. Recently, we had an amusing incident. A new deputy sheriff spotted Jan Hutchison carrying some of the volumes out of the CourtHouse. He waited until she was out of the building to stop her. Fortunately she was able to convince him not to arrest her.

We have outstanding leadership on the project. Jim Crowder, the outgoing chair of the Preservation Committee did a fantastic job in getting the project up and running. Jan Hutchison is the incoming Chair for 2009. Many of you will recall that Jan was instrumental in our loose records project. She has demonstrated her capability and desire to bring this project to successful fruition. The Committee members will remain the same. Charlotte Tucker is a mainstay. Sometimes, I think this project is her full-time job. Janet McElroy brings computer and librarianship skills to the table. Joyce Lamont has years of rare book experience. Jim Crowder and Chuck Gerda provide networking, Internet and other computer skills. Ann Fulmer is our liaison with the people in the County Court House. Collectively, they exceed the sum of the parts - - they make up a great team.

So, we have cleared the harbor and are underway. We, however, have a long journey ahead of us. Our greatest challenge will be in getting all of the volumes indexed. Should you be interested in helping, please contact Jan Hutchison. Her e-mail address is: janhutchison@comcast.net.

In closing, I feel remiss in not specifically recognizing all of the people who have contributed to this effort. We do not capture all of the hours on this project, but know conservatively that over 2,000 hours have been donated to date. I am very proud of our community and especially The Night Group of the Tuscaloosa Genealogy Society.

