

JEFFERSON COUNTY CLERK RECORDS: Deed Books

By Donald E. Watts, 10 January 2014

The Jefferson County Clerk “serves as the chief election authority for the County. Along with administering elections, the Clerk's Office maintains birth, marriage and death records, [and] records documents...”¹ A major function of the County Clerk's Office is to keep records of all legal agreements that affect Jefferson County residents, some of which are deeds.

I will explain what the paper records consist of for the early period of Jefferson County, Virginia and West Virginia (1801-1906). Also, I will explain where the researcher may view available digital copies of recorded deeds and what digital records the researcher should expect to find. This article is not a “how-to” use the collection’s general indexes to deeds or how to find or use recorded deeds.

The deed records collection are located in the Jefferson County Clerk’s Office, 100 E. Washington Street, Charles Town, WV.

The deed collection consists of General Indexes to Deeds and Deed Books. This article limits the information about the collection to those indices and books between the years 1801 (when Jefferson County, Virginia was formed) and 1906.

General Index to Deeds. There are eight general indexes for this period; each index is labeled on the front cover and on the spine. Labels for the first four books include inclusive dates and labels for the last four only have beginning dates.

i. Book 1 1801 - 1831

ii. Book 2 1831 – 1847

iii. Book 3 1847 – 1861 (Includes War Book; see War Book later in article.)

iv. Book 4 1865 – 1875

v. Book 5 1875

vi. Book 6 1886

vii. Book 7 1893

viii. Book 8 1899 (Book 9 begins with 1906)

Beginning in 1942, general indexes are labeled alphabetically. An example: A 1942 – Z 1972; A 1973 – Z 1982; A 1983 – Z 1988. Even though there are twenty-six letters in each alphabetic set, the years included in the alphabetic set may not equal twenty-six years.

Deed Books. The numbering system for the deed books underwent four changes during the period about which I write:

I. Deed Books 1 – 40 (Deed Book 40 is called the War Book), 1801 - 1865

¹ <http://www.jeffersoncountywv.org/county-government/elected-officials/county-clerk>, March 5, 2019

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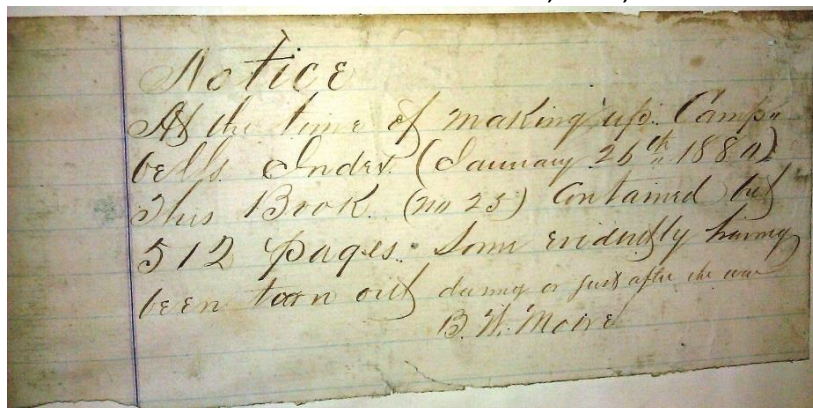
li. Deed Books 1 – 7, 1865 - 1872

lii. Deed Books A – Z (except there is no book J), 1873 - 1891

iv. Deed Books 73 – 88, 1888 - 1899

Why does the fourth system begin with book number 73? There are forty books (including the War Book) in system 1; seven books in system 2; and, twenty-five books in system 3 (this set excludes the letter J). Summing these three sets of numbers gives seventy-two, ergo, the fourth system beginning with 73.

You will notice that at least in one instance a major county interruption occurred, the Civil War (War Between the States). When Jefferson County joined West Virginia, the county clerk decided to begin renumbering the set, therefore another set of books from 1 to 7. The third set was begun by yet another county clerk, probably because he noticed that there would be two sets of books with the same number. And, then, we find that another county clerk decided that



the numbering set should be continuous, therefore beginning with number 73.

The War Book. With the interruption of civil activities in Virginia, due to the Civil War, a book 40, the War Book, was used to record deeds between 1862 and 1865. The book has 44 pages and the index for the

recording of the deeds in this book may be found in the General Index of Deeds, Book 3. The deeds are indexed as WB with the associated page number in the deed book.

There is another General Index to Deeds not found in the racks with the other indexes. It is called the Campbell Index. The person for whom this index is named is, as of this writing, unknown to me. There is this note in the back of Deed Book 25:

Notice

At the time of making up Campbells Index (January 26th 1880) This Book (no 25) contained but 512 pages. Some evidently having been torn out during or just after the war. /signed/ B.W. Moore²

B.W. Moore (Berkeley Ward Moore) was the son of Thomas A. Moore, clerk of the county. On the 1880 US Census, B.W. Moore has stated his occupation as “Dealer in Compost.”³ He and his family live with his father.

Campbell’s Index, about which Moore has placed the notice in Deed Book 25, may be classified as a master index of all deeds from 1801, Deed Book 1, through 1879, Deed Book G, or, a master index for the general indexes 1 through part of 6. Campbell’s index is organized by the alphabet, with all names beginning with the first letter of the alphabet grouped in one section, for all years covered, 1801 – 1879 (*i.e.*, all surnames beginning with A in one section for all covered years, then B in one section for all covered years, etc.). The surnames are not in

² Jefferson County Clerk Records, Deed Book 25, end page.

³ 3 Year: 1880; Census Place: Charlestown, Jefferson, West Virginia; Roll: 1405; Family History Film: 1255405; Page: 90B; Enumeration District: 005. Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. 1880 U.S. Census Index provided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints © Copyright 1999 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

alphabetic order within each alphabetic letter (all A's grouped together, B's grouped together, etc.) for the years covered; instead, the names are in the order found in the deed books.

As of this writing, Campbell's Index is in fair to poor condition. The Jefferson County Clerk has recognized its value and has decided to have it repaired sometime in 2014.

Researching Using the Internet. For those researchers who wish to research the deed books of the Jefferson County Clerk's Office, but who may not be in the local area (or wish to work from home), the clerk has digitized most of the collection. The clerk's webpage is:
<http://www.jeffersoncountywv.org/county-government/elected-officials/county-clerk>

Early deeds (1801 - 1841) may be read by using the Jefferson County Clerk's on-line database search system, Jefferson County Document Inquiry. First, using a browser of your choice, navigate to the clerk's web page: <http://www.jeffersoncountywv.org>. In the right sidebar find and select Jefferson County Document Inquiry. At the document inquiry page you may search for information by Individual, Business, Book-Page or Instrument. Most often the researcher will search for information about individuals.

My experience doing searches in the document inquiry database has found that deeds recorded in Deed Books 1 through 25, ending at page 327 – 328 (1841) have been digitized (there are more than 328 pages in Book 25). Sporadic digitizing has been done for parts of other deed books in the remainder of the first system set, books 25 through 40, but no digitizing has been done of the second system set (1-7) or of the third system set (A-I and K-Z). Digital images of deeds do not begin again until Deed Book 90, page 1 (1901).

Since this is not a "how-to" instruction, I leave it to the researcher to learn how to use this inquiry function. It is, generally, a simple search; however, one may not save, copy or print documents.

I wish those of you interested in the deeds recorded in the Jefferson County Clerk's Office success in your research.