

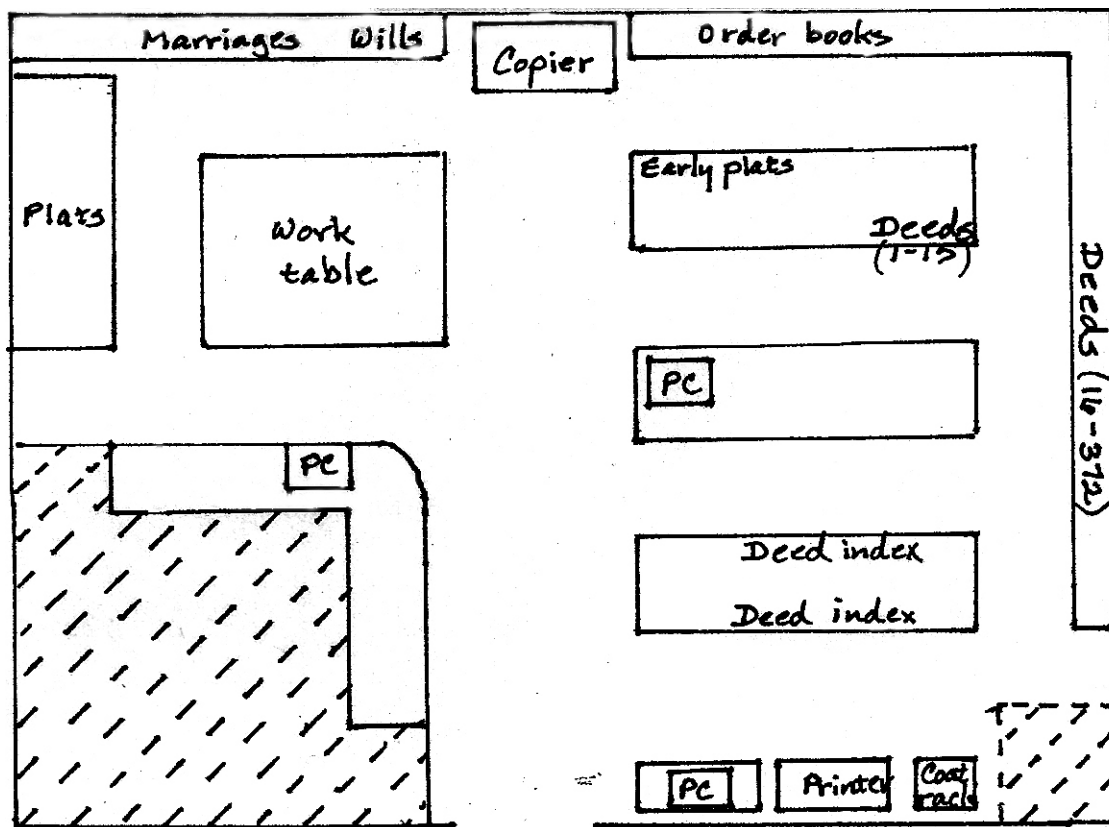
Family Research in the Grayson County, Virginia Court House

The three primary sets of records of interest to family researchers are wills, deeds, and marriage records. All are available in the deed room adjacent to the Clerk's office on the second floor of the court house. To reach this area enter the courthouse through the front entrance and go left to the Clerk's office. Turn left at the counter and continue into the deed room.

When you walk into the deed room, take a moment to orient yourself. Immediately to the left of the window and copy machine are the will books, and left of the will books are the marriage records. To the right of the window are order books. Most deed books are along the right wall and plats are on the left wall adjacent to the work table.

Copies are self-serve and 50 cents per page payable to one of the folks in the Clerk's office as you leave. For the large books a reduction to 92% on 11 x 17 paper works well. Before wrestling with the entire book on the copier, examine it to see if pages can be removed. Most of the books have inside the front and back covers a hinge-type apparatus that can be disengaged to release the binding. To do so pull down on the small grip at the bottom of the hinge. Those of us with tendonitis or arthritis may need to enlist the help of some other kind person to deal with these but a single page is much easier to handle at the copy machine. Please carefully return pages and books to their proper places.

Rest rooms are at the other end of the building.



Deed Room (not to scale)

Wills

The Will Books (1-36) are in the book case immediately left of the window. There are two sets of indices, one for devisors (the person writing the will) and the other for devisees (the persons receiving bequests in the will). Many of our Grayson ancestors did not leave wills but instead gave land or other possessions to their heirs during their lifetimes. Accounts of estate sales may provide clues as to neighbors and possibly relatives of the deceased.

Marriage records

To the left of the Will Books are the marriage records. The index to the marriage records is broken into two volumes, A-K and L-Z. Both grooms and brides are indexed. Marriage Registers 1-7 are near the indices. In addition, copies of all marriage licenses from 1853 to 1931 are filed in the white binders on the shelves in this area. Researchers should check these licenses as they may contain more information than the Registers.

Prior to 1853 there were no marriage licenses. One option during the early days of the county was to publish banns (in the church or other public place) for a couple of weeks after which a minister could marry the couple with no civil record of the marriage.

The second option was by use of marriage bonds. The surviving marriage bonds are located in the seven white volumes in the far left corner. In a perfect record there would be two records, the bond and the return which the minister was supposed to bring back to the court house after he married the couple. In many instances one or both of these scraps of paper have been lost. Marriage bonds reflect early colonial days when the governor of the colony had to give permission for a couple to marry. After the population of the colony increased to the point where the governor did not know everyone personally, some member of the community was required to guarantee that the couple was known to him and that they were free to marry—that the groom didn't already have another wife, for example. Marriage bonds do not identify parents but the bondsman, also called the surety, often but not always was a relative of the couple.

Deeds

Indices to the Deed Books are under the first counter on your right as you enter the deed room with indices to the grantors (sellers) being underneath one side of this counter and indices to the grantees (buyers) underneath the other side. These are further subdivided by ranges of years so it is necessary to make sure you have the right volume for the time period being researched. All recent deeds (since the early 1980s) have been digitized and can be accessed via the computers around the room, but most family researchers will need to wrestle with the deed books. In the event a more recent deed is needed a hard copy can be obtained using the printer to the right of the doorway.

Deed Books 1-15 are not on the wall but instead are hidden under the right end of the last counter on the right. Deed Books 16-372 are arranged sequentially on the right-hand wall.

If you are fortunate enough to find a deed reference to a plat number those are filed in a rack on the left side of the room beside the work table. Note that the printed numbers on the rack do not show the full numbers but just part of the numbers. This does a really good job of confusing most of us. The printed numbers above the plat sleeves show a sequence such as “1201 3 5 7 9 211 13 15”. This indicates that plats 1201, 1203, 1205, 1207, 1209, 1211, 1213, and 1215 are filed directly beneath the printed numbers. Please note that plats 1202, 1204, ..., 1216 are also filed in this area since two plats are filed in each sleeve.

If you are working with really early county deeds Plat Books A, 2, 3, 1 and 4 are filed under the left end of the counter closest to the copy machine.

The first deeds and surveys of Grayson lands were recorded while this region was part of Fincastle (1774-1775) and Montgomery (1776-1789) Counties. Those records are located in the Montgomery County court house in Christiansburg. Any deeds and surveys recorded while this area was part of Wythe (1790-1792) are in the Wythe County court house in Wytheville.

Other Records

To the right of the window and copy machine are the common law order books and chancery order books. While both of these may contain scraps of family history, they unfortunately are not indexed. The chancery records themselves are indexed but the index is not available to the public. If you need information from a specific chancery file please see a staff member for assistance. The request here is that family researchers not go on a “fishing expedition” for these records as the staff really does have other work to do.

On the shelves with the Marriage Registers is a single volume of the Birth Register covering most but not all of the years from 1853 to 1869. Many births were not recorded. This volume and all other known county-level birth and death records have been transcribed and are available online at newriversnotes.com. Since 1913 all birth and death records have been maintained at the state level.

For further assistance in researching your family history, contact:

Grayson County, Virginia Heritage Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 679
Independence, VA 24348

The Foundation office is located in the Gynn Shopping Center at 578 F East Main Street inside the Mini-Mall entrance.

Hours:

October through April: Friday 10:00 – 4:00

May through September: Thursday and Friday 10:00 – 4:00

or by appointment by emailing research_support@graysonheritage.org