Stories from the Stacks

First Fridays with the Metro Archives

Our “First Fridays” are free events that are always on the first Friday of every month from 9:00-10:30am at the Bellevue YMCA/FiftyForward Turner Center.

December 6th, 2019: Ridley Wills will discuss his newest book on Nashville Pikes.


February 7th, 2020: Krista Castillo will discuss Fort Negley and its designation as UNESCO Site of Memory.

If you are interested in presenting for a First Friday, please contact Kelley Sirko at 615-862-5880, or by email at Kelley.Sirko@nashville.gov.

NEH-Funded Film Conservation Project in Metro Archives Now Completed

Over the past year and a half, 400 rare films in the Metro Archives collections were re-housed, inventoried, and inspected through support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The goal of the project is to increase the lifespan of films which document the history and culture of the South, and to improve storage conditions for all Metro collections.

The project brought archivist Melanie Meents on staff to perform conservation and re-housing of the collection. Continued on page 2.
Chatterbird to Perform Live to Rare Footage from Metro Archives at the Parthenon

Join us November 10th at the Parthenon! As part of the Parthenon’s Echo series, Chatterbird Music Ensemble will be performing a life music score to rare footage preserved this year by Nashville Metro Archives’ Audiovisual Heritage Center. Cocktails are at 6pm and the music starts at 7pm.

Click HERE for more information and tickets.

NEH-Funded Film Project (cont.)

Meents is now Audiovisual Archives Assistant at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During the project, some of the most important films in the collection were identified and preserved, including:

- Footage of soldiers during WWI playing instruments.
- Footage of Opryland theme park in the 1970s
- Footage of the Nashville Airport c.1976.

The footage can be streamed on the Metro Archives’ Audiovisual Heritage Center’s streaming video page.

For more information on the project, follow our series on the Nashville Public Library blog, Film Preservation at Nashville Metro Archives. Click on the tag “audiovisual preservation” to the right of the page to see all of the posts.

More information on the Audiovisual Heritage Center can be viewed on our website.

New Nashville Slave and Free People of Color Database

The Metro Archives has published a searchable online database of enslaved and free people of color in an effort to make genealogical information more accessible to our researchers. Based on the records found in the Davidson County will books from 1780-1865, this database contains information regarding the movements and enslaved African-Americans in Nashville before Emancipation.

The Nashville Slave and Free People of Color Database includes information (if given) such as:

- The name, age, and sex of the enslaved individual;
- The enslaved individual’s family relationships;
- The name of the slaveholder;
- Where and/or to whom the enslaved individual was transferred;
- Location information for the original record.

The database can be accessed and searched here: http://www.nashvilleslaveresords.com/

If you find a record in the database and would like to see the original document, please contact us with the book and page number. We will send a digital image of the document to you, either by email or by postal mail.

Our will books are not the only materials that contain these kinds of records—our deed books and court records also contain a wealth of information for genealogy research. The Nashville Slave and Free People of Color Database Project is ongoing, and we hope to add more records to the database as we continue to compile data.
Votes for Women

The Votes for Women Interactive Exploration Exhibit will open in time to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment; the amendment that no longer allowed the federal government or any state to deny voting rights based on sex. The room strives to educate and inspire all visitors about the power of women and girls, the power of voting, and the power of power itself.

Metro Archives has contributed to the planning of this exhibit through research and content development. While the time frame is mostly outside of the materials in the Archives’ collections, we have still been able to contribute some photographs, primary sources, and newspaper clippings (which includes headlines and political cartoons). With the collaboration of our work and several others involved, the room is set to open at the Nashville Public Library’s Main branch in downtown Nashville in Spring of 2020. Please stay tuned!

Some examples of items the Metro Archives has contributed:

- Headlines from our own physical copies of the *Tennessean*, *Evening Tennessean*, and *Nashville Banner* from 1920.
- Political cartoons and other smaller clippings from the same newspapers.
- Photographs of various individuals involved in the suffrage movement, such as Anne Dallas Dudley, Carrie Chapman Catt, Katherine Burch Warner, and from our own collection of her materials, Anita Williams.
- A variety of other photographs, including: street scenes around Nashville during 1920, important buildings for the movement such as the Hermitage Hotel and the State Capitol building, and photos for the timeline of other influential individuals that have continued paving the path of women’s equality and empowerment to this day.

Portrait of Anita Williams, President of the Tennessee League of Women Voters from 1926 -1931.
Old dogs care about you, even when you make mistakes,
God Bless the children while they’re still too young to hate.
I’ve tried it all, when I was young and in my natural prime,
Now it’s old dogs and children and watermelon wine.

Nashville’s Dog Ownership
From the Metropolitan Archivist, Ken Fieth

It’s hard not to hum a Tom T. Hall tune while looking over the Davidson County Registration of Dogs for the Sheep Fund.

As early as 1860, the Tennessee Legislature established that stray dogs were a problem to be addressed. An act passed assuming stray dogs were likely to kill sheep and those who killed such dogs were protecting their property (sheep), which is a “good defense” before the law. The Act went on to say that those who owned such dogs were liable for any damages caused, especially “killing or worrying” sheep.

There is a list of people that worry me, but so far killing them is out, but I do remain hopeful.

In 1873, legislation passed that levied a tax on dogs, with the assumption that owners of strays would dispose of them to avoid paying any tax. Again, aimed at protecting the sheep breeding industry.

It worked as well as one might imagine. In some parts of Tennessee, photographs show lots of dogs. No, those folks had no intention of paying a tax for their dog. I have a great snapping turtle story that illustrates this point, but I’m at a loss as to how to work it in with the dog and sheep idea.

The problem of populous canines moved the city council to react. After all, the area around Mill Creek near Murfreesboro Road, known in genteel circles as Glencliff, was called “Dogtown” by the locals.

So, by 1893, there were established ordinances governing dogs. Dog ownership incurred a tax. The dog just have a “medal having the number stamped theron, which shall be kept about the neck of the dog, attached to a collar.”

That ordinance led to the creation of the Registration of Dogs for the Sheep Fund. We have examples from 1919-1921. The ledgers included name, address, type of dog, gender, dog name and tax paid. On the surface, these seem pointless and are a candidate for destruction. But these volumes can provide insight into the people and the culture of the time.

Looking deeper than an example of a tax collection system, a point in time emerges. While society and culture change, habit and tradition quietly muddle along in the background, often oblivious to their highly visible companions.

For instance, dog names. These century-old ledgers are populated with the age-old Rex, Rover, Spot, Fido, Jack, and the unfortunate yellow dog mix named Mutt. Jack is the most popular name, followed by Rex and Spot in a close second.

The 1919 register lists a gray lab named Cigarette. Smoking cigarettes was a fashion picked up by our soldiers in World War I and brought back home. Was the owner of Cigarette a veteran or just somebody intrigued by a new item in our culture?

Relatively uninspiring is a Collie dog named “Dog.” You want uninspiring? Luke Lea, the man that came up with the plan to kidnap the Kaiser called his Shepherd, “Shep.” Really. That’s it.

Will Cheek’s white poodle was named “Snowball.” Somehow, I easily imagine the Cheeks having a white poodle.

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Nashville’s Dog Ownership (cont.)

One that stood out was a black Labrador retriever named “Floyd,” which brings up a funny mental image of old reliable farm dog Floyd. While “Floyd” is lost to time, he was still loved enough for someone to pay his tax.

Of course, tradition and habit also engender names that show the dark side of that time. Ugly names that convey ridicule and are demeaning in many ways. Those won’t be given the courtesy of being printed here.

Yet, aside from names, general patterns of ownership reveal interesting things. Inside the City Wards were small breeds: often terriers or poodles. County Districts were full of working dogs: shepherds, collies, and retrievers.

Lonnie Burns at one time was a city policeman. That fact isn’t in the Register; however, his black Labrador was named “Nightstick.” Lonnie probably wasn’t a warm and fuzzy city cop.

Why keep these? What can these tell us of a Nashville sometimes shrouded in unsolved mysteries or unanswered questions? For one, people appear here that have no voice, no presence in any other record. A poor sharecropper won’t be in the City Directory, doesn’t register a deed, was never sued, arrested, or made a will. The only evidence of them is their affection for their pet. They are lost except for having a dog.

Old dogs and children are still some of the best things in life.

Newly Processed Collections

More Mayoral Papers

One hundred and sixty-nine boxes, nearly 1,500 items, over 100,000 sheets of paper, countless staples, and one heck of a paperweight collection later, the Philip N. Bredesen Mayoral Papers have finally been fully processed. Containing the records of Phil Bredesen’s time as Mayor of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County from 1991-1999, this is indeed a great resource.

Don’t let the sheer volume of materials scare you; this collection contains a wealth of information about Nashville’s exponential growth and development as a city. Anyone interested in urban development, politics, sports, and/or the arts would find this collection to be an invaluable resource.

Processing this collection took a total of six months, and it now lives in our off-site storage facility.

A Case of Mistaken Currency and other Circuit Court Case Files

Our Fall 2019 intern, Marina, has finished processing our small collection of Circuit Court Case Files. Dating back to the early 1800s up until the 1950s, these files record civil cases tried in Davidson County’s First, Second, and Third Circuit Courts.

Everything from cases of debt, to divorce, to naturalizations is covered in these case files. Even one 1863 case in which a man, sent on a mission to sell another man’s mules, was sued because the Confederate currency he brought back in exchange for those mules was useless to his employer in Union-occupied Nashville.

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Newly Processed Collections (cont.)

These case files are the only surviving case files we have from early Davidson County Circuit Court—the rest have unfortunately not survived. We are excited that these have finally been indexed and inventoried, as they provide invaluable information and insight into Nashville’s litigious past.

Stay tuned for more processed collections in the next newsletter!

Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville and Davidson County

As a division of the Nashville Public Library, we collect and preserve historically valuable records relating to the local government bodies of the City of Nashville, Davidson County, and Metropolitan Government. In addition, we also house other records of enduring historic value that document and reflect the history of Nashville and Davidson County. We have over 5 million records in our collection that date from 1780 to the present.

Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville and Davidson County
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A division of the Nashville Public Library, the Metro Archives collects and preserves the historically valuable records of Nashville and Davidson County.

Hours:
Monday-Friday: 9:00-6:00
Saturday: 9:00-5:00
Sunday: 2:00-5:00