

The Clamshell
A Quarterly Newsletter of the Maryland State Archives

Box 7, Folder 2. Second Quarter of 2026

In this Issue:

Letter from the Conservation Lab

Bench Training– A Definition

Staff Updates

- New Staff & Retirement

Class of 2025 Summer Interns Project Reports

- **Information Technology Department**
  - The Known Unknown: A Post-Mortem of an IT Intern
  - Improving Accessibility and Facing Challenges with the IT Development Team
- **Special Collections Department**
  - My Summer in Special Collections
- **Conservation Department**
  - A Peek into the Lab: Conservation and Collections Care at the Archives
- **The Study of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland**
  - Learning About Archives Through Documents Regarding Enslaved Individuals in Kent County
- **Reference Department**
  - A Very Referential Summer

Editorial Staff

Letter from the Conservation Lab

How time flies when what you are doing suits you well! Never would I have thought I would be at the Archives for a little over 20 years. But, as the story goes, starting as an intern in 2004 led me down an inspiring path, allowing me to follow what fascinates me and quench my desire to work with books. Little did I know that a career at the Archives would make me feel so deeply connected to a team and part of something bigger than myself.

I studied fine art at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in the late 90's and at the time had no idea that book conservation was even a field. As serendipity would have it, conservation found me. An opportunity presented itself to intern at the Maryland State Archives through its summer internship program. That one summer changed everything. Day in and day out, I learned the nuts and bolts of book preservation and paper repair at the bench of the Senior Conservator. I was hooked and begged to stay on as a contractual employee. Fortunately, at the time, they needed an extra full-time hand to keep the Conservation Lab up and running, fulfilling all sorts of needs for the care of the Archive's holdings. Every day was a joy learning something new, using my hands, and exploring the world of conservation with all its cool tools and endless options for fixing things.

Fortunately, the Archives has kept up a robust internship program, and I have had the pleasure of mentoring many of the students in the field of Conservation. Over the years, the Conservation Lab has proven to be a popular place for interns to experience a hands-on approach to the world of Archives, a home for primary documents to stay safe, be organized, and made accessible. Typically, we invite each cohort of interns to visit us in the lab, encouraging them to watch us work, shadow us for a day, or simply pop by for a chat about their projects. I grew to value these interactions deeply—not just as moments to share our passion for preservation, but as a chance to pass forward the same spark that first welcomed me through these doors two decades ago. This journey has shown me that conservation isn't just about preserving historical documents; it's about preserving knowledge, fostering connections, and supporting the broader mission of ensuring our collections remain meaningful and accessible for future generations.

Camille DiMarco
Lead Conservator
Intern Class of 2004

Bench Training– A Definition

Bench Training is a practical form of instruction in which individuals learn conservation techniques, for instance, directly from a senior professional. It is akin to an apprenticeship where skills for the treatment and repair of collection items are taught hands-on by those already established in the field. Bench Training can be undertaken in addition to or in place of formal training at an academic institution.

Staff Updates

New Staff



Adam Gray joins us as an Accessibility Archivist in the Appraisal Department. He holds an MLIS with a Specialization in Archives and Digital Curation from the University of Maryland, and a BA in Visual and Performing Arts from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He most recently worked as a Metadata Analyst at PBS and previously served as a Project Archivist at the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives.



Jordan Gregory joins us as an Archivist Trainee in the Digital Acquisition, Processing and Publication Department mostly in Annapolis. He has a Bachelor's degree in Applied Liberal Studies with a concentration in Media & Communications with a minor in Sociology from Morgan State University. His future plans are to gain a Masters degree in Library Science from the University of Maryland College Park with a focus on archives and digital curations.



Samantha Escobar joins us as an Archival Assistant II in the Digital Acquisition, Processing and Publication Department. She graduated from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) in 2025 with a degree in Media Communication.

Retirement

In September 2026, Reference Archivist **Vickie Allan** retired after 43 years of state service. Ms. Allan joined the Maryland State Archives in 1983 and has provided in-depth customer service to our stakeholders both in person in our public search room and remotely through mail, email and phone throughout her entire career. Vickie has an incredible depth of knowledge on the Archives' collections and research techniques which will be sincerely missed by both our patrons and her Reference Services colleagues. We thank her for her service, wish her well in her retirement, and send best wishes as she embarks on this new chapter in her life.

Class of 2025 Summer Interns Project Reports



Information Technology Department

The Known Unknown: A Post-Mortem of an IT Intern

By Zachary Ayers, Rochester Institute of Technology

When I first started work at the Maryland State Archives in June, I learned quite quickly that my school could only teach so much. The journey through my internship has been a mixture of research and going back to the drawing board so that websites could look the best while being accessible to users.

My first project was to audit and remediate the Records Management website for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, which frankly terrified me. As much as my technical assessment may have convinced my managers, I was certainly a novice at finding, let-alone fixing, ADA violations. But, after a day of bumbling around and doing research, I got all the compliance issues cleaned up and ready to be sent out to the world.

My next task was again auditing and remediating for ADA compliance, but this time I was tasked with the Artistic Properties Commission website. Compared to Records Management, it was clear this site would need a lot more TLC.

After finalizing the ADA audit for the Artistic Properties Commission website, I was given a big task: create a website template for any state commission that the Archives is supporting. For this design I wanted to focus on three pillars: Simplicity (the site itself must be easy to read and easy to write: everything should *just work*, no added effort); Aesthetic (the design must be serious); and Easy to Read (there should be no barriers to entry and the site should be accessible to all users). After brainstorming, I took on the idea of a weathered newspaper for the “light mode” variant of the site and the night sky that falls in autumn for the “dark mode”. The “dark mode” variant neatly coincided with the colors of an oriole, which reminds me of Baltimore. During this design time, I also ran into the most interesting conundrum.

Be warned, there’s about to be a *lot* of technical jargon thrown around.

When designing websites, it is imperative that websites have similar/the same structure on every page, just with different content. Thus, it is important that modern web developers make components, or reusable snippets of website code, in order to use in other places. I had to make these myself.

Components ensure consistency across the website, but come with one major drawback: the website may appear to shift around and “jump” when loading the page. This is because of how the standard implementation of a component is made without modern website frameworks:

1. Create the component
2. Store it in a different file (often an HTML file in a specific directory that’s also kept on the server)
3. Whenever we need it (a.k.a every time we load a page), we may request the file from the server
    a. Note: the file isn’t *actually* being requested from the server every time, if the file is in your browser’s cache it will instead load from there.
4. Add the code snippet to the website.

Requests to the server are called **fetch requests** and they are marked as asynchronous, meaning that the browser will continue to load the website while the request is being sent and received. And by the time that the component is loaded again and put into the website, the website has probably loaded the entire document. So in order to make it faster and avoid the “shifting” behavior, I needed a different approach.

I decided to try out a relatively new system for components using a new API (application program interface) called a **Shared Worker**, which lives in a separate environment (and separate thread) from the thread that is loading the website page. The main advantage to the Shared Worker is this: the data that it stores persists across sessions–which means it can persist across loading new pages.

This system completely skips checking the file system cache since it only needs to be loaded once in the very beginning and can be stored in the much faster RAM of the computer instead of being unloaded after use. This means that whenever we want a component, we can instead ask the Shared Worker, “do you have this already loaded?” If it does, then it will return that data to the main process, which will then add the component to the document. If the Shared Worker has not loaded the document, the worker will instead load the component through the same fetch request that had been set up before. In the end, this process actually saves upwards of 150 ms (which is a lot for anyone in the tech world). To continue, while the Shared Worker is also asynchronous, it returns a whole lot quicker, which means the loading can be concealed in typical page load, adding to the user experience.

Phew, we’ve made it through the technical jargon. I’m glad you stuck around. Now, onto bigger and brighter things.

After finalizing the implementation and design of the template, I showed the result to Chris Haley and William Kelly, the director and lead research archivist of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland program. The consensus: they loved it! So much so, they gave me another task: redesign the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland program website. This was a project that was long in-the-process, but staff felt it was more than time to do a rebrand in addition to making the site ADA compliant. And looking at the old Legacy of Slavery in Maryland site, I had to agree.

So, I got to work. I had most of the architecture done, so all that was left for me to do was bring content from the old site to the new one. The actual time spent on porting over content wasn’t too long, however with weekly stand-up meetings and field trips underway it took slightly longer than I anticipated. In the end, it took me about four weeks to get to a good-enough spot to say “I can move on.” In that time, I also made an interactive map viewer using the Canvas API (which allows direct drawing to the screen). That was a fun experience too, since I had some experience from school assignments and now I could finally put it to the test.

After finalizing the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland site, I moved on to my last and most daunting project: a redesign of the Maryland State Art Collection website. I was so honored to be chosen for this project given the State’s vast and beautiful collection. And so, I got to work once again.

The Maryland State Art Collection was an absolute beast to tame as a website. First, there’s **so. much. art.** that I had to figure out how to format. To continue, I also had to design a system such that the Curator and Director of the Artistic Properties Commission, Robin Gower and Chris Kintzel respectively, could go in and update it when needed. I also took inspiration from online photo galleries like Unsplash and the National Gallery of Art in order to develop a look that could offer both an interactive experience and information about the art in a way where it could shine.

The big thing Chris focused on was that I should build out a full category of artwork, just to show the plan. This was quite daunting, considering that I didn’t know how scalable my architecture was. And spoiler alert, it was not scalable. So, halfway through making the new site, I needed to completely remake the system for loading data.

I decided to make a registry system, which effectively took in data and put it into different buckets. Each registered item needed to have a title, author, images, and a shorthand, which is effectively a key. All of these would go into their own separate buckets, and then on the site all we would need to

do is say ‘info=”{shorthand value}”’ and it would automatically load. And the system was insanely fast, loading thousands of data entries in less than 10 milliseconds and making searches way quicker.

In the last week of my internship, I was able to show State Archivist Elaine Rice Bachmann the new website– she liked it! There were a few tweaks I needed to make to fully fit her vision, but it went incredibly well.

And that concludes my internship! I’d like to say thank you to everybody at the Maryland State Archives for making this summer one of curiosity and learning. I have definitely grown as a programmer, user interface designer, and as a person overall, and I have to attribute this to the variety of work given to me. Will I continue to make websites? Probably, although my main focus is in video game development. Will I come back to the Maryland State Archives? Yes, if they hire me again next summer or some time in the future after I’m done with school and looking for full-time employment. I hope that my future endeavors in my career are as fruitful as this internship was.

As a final piece of wisdom to any younger people, I will say this: I did not use generative AI to assist any of my writing, design, e-mails, or life during this internship, though it is an option. Your job as an employee is to provide a perspective that is different and fresh, to talk to coworkers about potential solutions, to foster connection between teammates, and to laugh about silly mistakes on top of the responsibilities written into your contract. Generative AI can make you fast at your contract job, but is designed to make you isolated and dependent at your human job, like a toxic relationship. To be clear, Generative AI writes less secure code and redundant code, creates art that is meant to be consumed temporarily and cannot ever be fully preserved (while using art that was stolen), makes text that talks a lot without saying a lot, and makes its user overconfident and delusional given enough “conversations”. Generative AI is anti-human down to its inner fibers (or, I guess circuitry if we want to fit the description better). At an institution like the Maryland State Archives, where the focus is exclusively on troves of information that are meant to be preserved as they are exclusively human experiences, using generative AI for any of this process felt counterproductive to the mission.

Improving Accessibility and Facing Challenges with the IT Development Team

By Jonathan Earnest, University of Maryland College Park

My internship with the Maryland State Archives IT Development team was an opportunity for me to gain experience in the world of professional programming. I learned so much, not just about the history of Maryland, but also technical and professional skills like working with legacy systems and communication. My experience helped me to explore what I am interested in as a software developer as well as feeding my curiosity for history.

I began my internship working on starter projects meant to teach me everything necessary for my work here at the Archives. I was to recreate the Early Settlers of Maryland website and an internal desktop application meant to be used by staff for data editing. This was my first exposure to Visual Basic and asp.net which are the language and framework that the development uses for all websites they maintain.

After completing my starter project, I was ready to work on real websites and in particular I was ready to make them compliant with the updated guidance provided in Title II of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which has been a huge focus of the IT Department lately. I started with the

website for the *Resurrecting Mt. Auburn Cemetery* project where I made many changes to make the site accessible to anyone and fixed some bugs and crashes while preserving the original design. I also worked on the Archives' Page Viewer, Special Collections, and St. Mary's Career Files websites to make them ADA compliant or, in the case of Page Viewer, to fix major bugs.

Halfway through my internship I was given a larger project to work on. The *Legacy of Slavery in Maryland* (LOSIM) website was being completely redesigned. This website is a joint effort by both teams in the IT department. I was tasked with creating the database page which my team is responsible for. I began by simply moving the old layout over to the new site and changing anything that needed to change to keep this new page cohesive with the rest of the website which the other IT team was working on. After getting the basic layout down, I began working with the team in charge of the LOSIM project to get their input on the design of the database page. This is where I learned of the problems that legacy systems may pose. Many of the changes requested, while certainly necessary, were difficult to actually make because of the existing code and the limitations of older technologies.

Though difficult at times, it was incredibly rewarding to work on these projects. I got to make history more accessible, and I learned so much. I may have started with the basics like learning Visual Basic and asp.net, but I also learned more, like the perseverance needed to address problems thoughtfully that will serve the system into the future.

I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity I have had to work with the IT Development team here at the Maryland State Archives and I thank the Development Team for their support as I learned and grew this summer.

Special Collections Department

My Summer in Special Collections

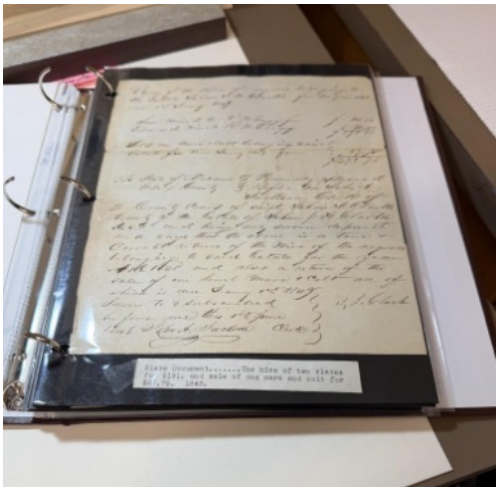
By Caelan Scott, Washington College

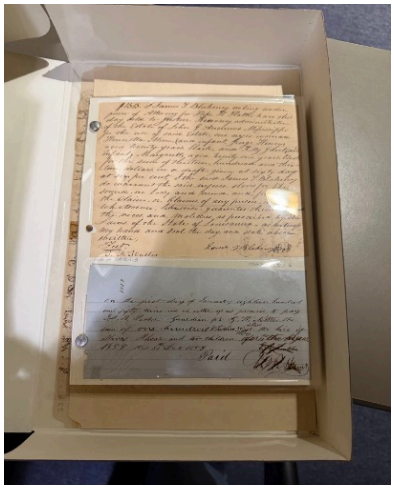
This summer I worked with the Special Collections Department at the Maryland State Archives (MSA) on a wide variety of projects. Throughout my weeks here, I have been able to rehouse, process, and catalog a diverse number of collections encompassing a wide array of mediums, including photographs, letters, pen and ink drawings, audio tapes, newspapers, and more.

The first collection that I had the pleasure of working on was the Edith Spaeth Collection (MSA SC 6513). Edith Spaeth was a prominent female science writer in the 1920s, who wrote many articles under her maiden name that were published alongside the research of the popular male scientists at the time. Spaeth attended Wellesley College and continued her studies at Radcliffe where she met her husband, Mr. Reynold Spaeth, who was attending Harvard at the time and whom she married in 1913. The Spaeth's also befriended a man named Robert Underhill, who Edith seems to have had an affair with. Underhill would make a successful name for himself in later decades, but during the early 1920s, Edith and Robert exchanged a series of love letters which were not discovered until renovations took place nearly a century later on the former Spaeth residence in Baltimore. The collection included 67 love letters, all sent from Robert to Edith, covering a wide variety of topics. Processing this collection included removing the letters from their envelopes, reading and analyzing them for content, and rehousing the letters and their corresponding envelopes into clearly labeled

files. The Spaeth collection was the first project I completed this summer, and it provided me with a basic understanding of how special collections are processed at MSA.

The second project that I worked on was the Howard Lynch Collection (MSA SC 6514). Howard Lynch was the first Equal Employment Opportunity Officer (EEO) for the Baltimore County Health Department and was one of the founders of the newsletter “Voice of Equality” which was sent across various state agencies to inform workers about their rights and new regulations as civil rights legislation began to develop in earnest throughout the 1960s and 70s. This project focused on organizing and rehousing the papers. Then I created a comprehensive catalog that will hopefully aid future researchers in navigating the collection. Working with the Lynch collection allowed me to gain a better understanding of how personal donations to the archives get processed from beginning to end.





My largest project this summer was processing the Charles Elwood Ardinger Collection (MSA SC 6510), examples shown above. The Ardinger collection was originally two scrapbooks, one contained bills of sale for enslaved people, while the other had paper currency. I started this project by cataloging the individual items in the scrapbooks into two series, and describing them for the finding aid. After completing the initial cataloging, I was able to work with the conservation staff on removing the items from the binders that they arrived in. While the initial scrapbooks kept the documents organized and in relatively good condition, they were not conducive to long term document health. With the help of the Conservation team we were able to remove the documents from their original scrapbooks by carefully cutting the tape that held them in place. After removing the tape, the documents needed to be placed in more effective housing and the best way to do that was by encapsulating the documents and currency into mylar sleeves. Using the encapsulator, a machine made specifically to allow encapsulating a wide variety of items, the documents were easily organized into ideal housing. Many archives do not have access to the technology that is available to the Maryland State Archives, which makes my experience with this collection all the more exciting.

I was also able to work on a few other projects this summer, mainly working on rehousing collections for future processing but also working with audio tapes and transcriptions. The MAYIS Oral History project is designed to make interviews with indigenous community elders and leaders available to the public as well as providing resources to help people connect to their heritage. One of my tasks with the MAYIS project was revising transcripts that had been generated for older tapes. This continues to be an ongoing project, and future interns will be able to revise the work that I have done and revise the preliminary transcripts generated for tapes that I digitized as well.

Overall my time at the Maryland State Archives has been an amazing opportunity for me to grow my skills as both a college student and a future archivist. I have been able to learn a variety of new things while being here this summer and the experience has solidified my desire to work in archives in the future. Working with the staff at the MSA has shown me that any path can be the right one as long as you enjoy where you are going.

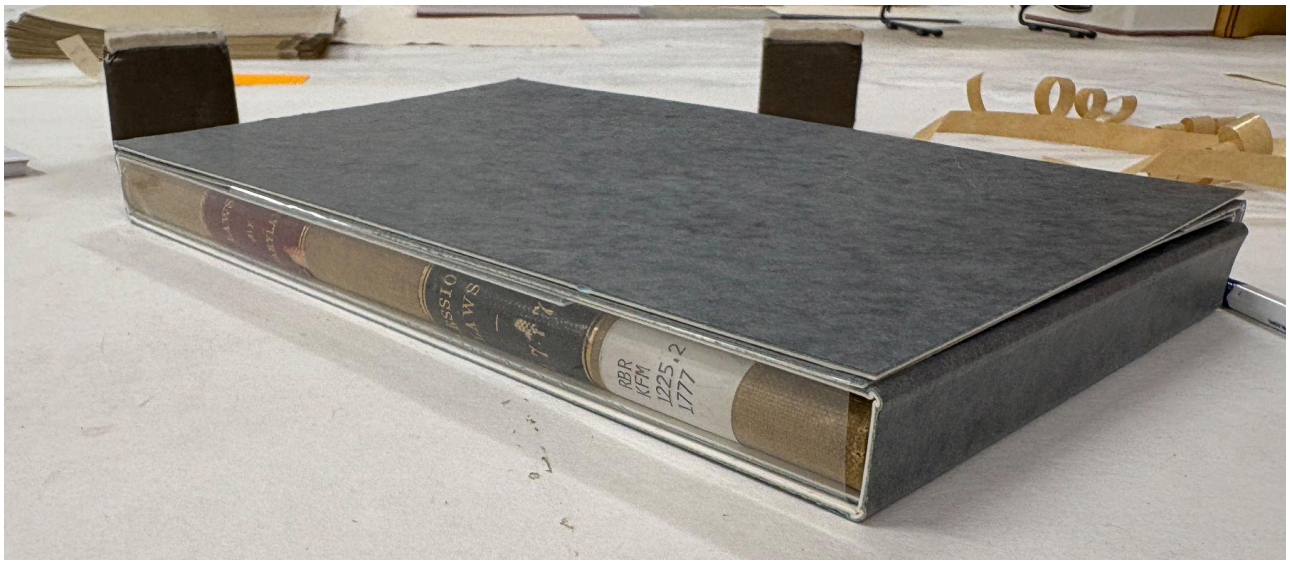
Conservation Department

A Peek into the Lab: Conservation and Collections Care at the Archives

By Ned Gaudry, St. John's College

This summer, I have had the privilege to return for a second internship at the Maryland State Archives. I previously worked as a Special Collections intern, processing new additions to the Archives' holdings and taking a survey of some legacy issues in specialized storage rooms; namely, the 'Map Room' and the 'Photo Room'. Due to the size of the Archives and its long history, tasks and issues of lower priority can persist for decades. Eventually, they become issues of higher priority. Understanding where and what those issues are and having a record of them makes it possible for something to be done about them. Additionally, I received some basic training from the Conservation team in paper repair using heat-set tissue (See last summer's Clamshell issue for a full report on that internship). Intrigued by the work, I decided to apply for a subsequent internship with Conservation and Special Collections to explore the possibility of pursuing a career in the conservation world.

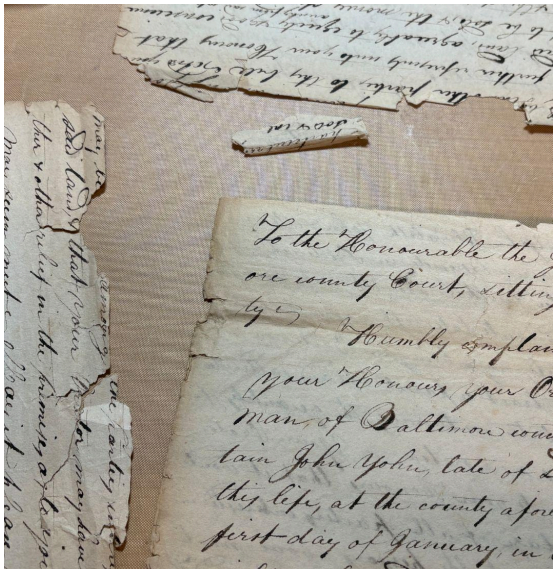
This summer, I had the opportunity to begin cultivating the skills needed for book and paper conservation. I read the Archive's library materials on book repair to gain a better understanding of the relevant terms and basic methods. I have also been able to shadow the Conservation team and help with the work that has come to the lab during this period– book, paper, and otherwise.

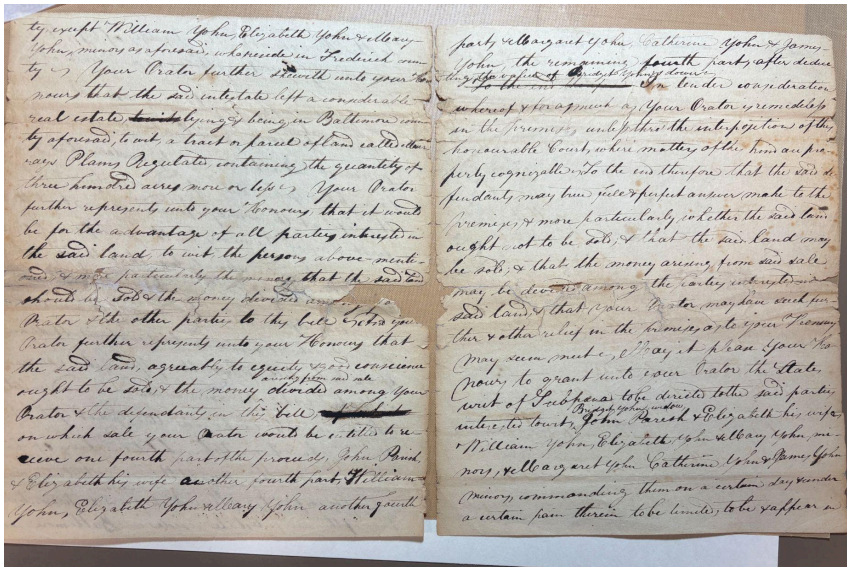


The work was not limited to what one thinks of as "conservation". Much of it, in fact, involved fabrication. I learned and practiced some bookbinding techniques to better understand how to repair books. I made fabric-covered display backboards; some for the documents on display in the Maryland State House for the 250th and some for general use–most recently used for displays to international delegations. I helped to make a custom fabric-covered box for a large book. I also made custom

phase boxes, referred to as Folger style, (see photo at above) for the books on deposit for repair from the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library. Then I developed and wrote a comprehensive set of instructions for making these enclosures.

Honing my hand skills through making objects has benefited me in conservation work. This summer, I mainly worked on books and documents to prepare them for imaging and handling. In some cases I repaired fragile documents which continued to crumble, even during repair, until I could fully stabilize them. Examples are shown below.





With an ongoing State Law Library project in Conservation, the opportunity arose to also work on repairing books. The mending pictured at right was done on a book covered in degrading leather, which was creating weak points at the hinges between the covers and the rest of the book. I used glue to reattach the spine to the text block and the leather cover to its boards, then repaired the hinges outside and in with wheat paste and Japanese tissue. Other, more structural repairs were done for several books as well.



While my main focus stayed on building up bench experience in the lab, I also shifted from the kind of collections management work I did last summer to collections care work; though the two are very intertwined. Practically speaking, I have done far less arrangement and description of individual collections and far more assessment, treatment, and preventative care of entire areas of the stacks.

Primarily, this was done through an ongoing Special Collections shelf-read of the basement stacks. I completed something similar for the ‘Photo Room’ last year, but this year I have been able to address more issues alongside assessment. One major task I undertook in addition to the shelf-read was redoing one section to assess the amount of time and effort necessary for such work (a section of the stacks is typically eight shelves from top to bottom). I reorganized the section, renumbered each box’s location, changed out any old boxes, rewrapped six large ledger books in more

conservation-friendly material, created new labels for almost every box, and updated the catalog for each and every item.

My previous internship cemented my desire to work in the Library/Archives field. This summer has further supported my inclination to pursue a career in Conservation. I have truly appreciated and enjoyed getting to learn more about the field, develop new skills, and contribute to such a vital institution.

The Study of the Legacy of Slavery in Maryland

Learning About Archives Through Documents Regarding Enslaved Individuals in Kent County

By Bandit (Lorelei) Powell, Washington College

Being an intern at the Maryland State Archives (MSA) has been an incredibly rewarding experience that has provided me with valuable skills and knowledge that I will carry into the future. During my internship, I worked in the Research Department, where my primary responsibility was examining historical documents related to enslaved people, indentured servants, and free Black individuals in Kent County, Maryland. This project is a partnership between MSA and the Chesapeake Heartland: An African American Humanities Project funded by a Council on Library and Information Resources grant.

The records I researched were divided into two collections. Documents dating from 1792 to 1851 are contained in one collection Kent County Court and Register of Wills (Court Papers, Blacks) MSA C3395, while records from 1852 to 1898 are found in another Kent County Court and Register of Wills (Court Papers, Blacks) MSA C3396. This division is due to the court structure being changed from the county court to the circuit court system by the 1851 Maryland Constitution. Intermixed in these series are documents traditionally filed with the Register of Wills as well. Together, these collections contain more than 1,200 documents. Working with these records has provided me with meaningful insight into the lives of African Americans during and after slavery. Reading petitions for freedom from enslaved individuals, legal documents like testimonies, certificates of freedom, and other historical records helped me better understand both the hardships enslaved people faced and the ways their lives were documented through the legal system.

One of the most challenging aspects of this internship has been learning to read eighteenth and nineteenth-century cursive. The handwriting in many of these documents can be difficult to decipher because of the decorative writing styles, faded ink, and age of the records. I cannot count the number of times I asked Jen Abbott or William Kelly, Research Archivists at the MSA, to help me interpret a signature or a word that I simply could not figure out. Although frustrating at times, this challenge became one of the most valuable learning experiences of my internship. Over time, I became more confident in recognizing historical handwriting by finding the same words or letters in other parts of the documents, if I did not recognize something just from familiarity with the subject. I also learned to approach difficult documents with greater patience and persistence.

Beyond improving my ability to read historical documents, this internship strengthened my research skills, attention to detail, and organizational abilities. I learned the importance of carefully reviewing primary sources, accurately recording information, and maintaining consistency throughout the

research process. This also strengthened a belief I gained in my internship which is that secondary sources should be used to put primary sources into correct historical context. I also gained a greater appreciation for the role archives play in preserving history and making it accessible to researchers and the public.

When I needed to ponder things that I had read, I'd research the things that piqued my interest in the documents. For example, I looked into the lives of William Graves and Jonas Elias. Jonas Elias, a free African American, attempted to free some of the people William Graves enslaved, but was caught and imprisoned. In prison, he either gave or sold his certificate of freedom to an enslaved African American named Toby. There was a warrant for Jonas Elias' arrest because of it, but I couldn't find any more documentation on the situation in my brief search.

Overall, my internship at MSA has been an outstanding experience. It has allowed me to contribute to an important historical project while developing practical research skills and a deeper understanding of Maryland's history. I am grateful for the guidance and support of the staff, especially Jen Abbott and William Kelly, whose patience and expertise made this experience both educational and enjoyable. I will leave this internship with a stronger appreciation for archival research and the importance of preserving historical records for future generations.

Reference Department

A Very Referential Summer

By N. Valerie Milsop, St. John's College



As anyone living in Maryland from the months of June to September will readily tell you, summers in the mid-Atlantic tend to be terrible, humid scorchers. Luckily, I was fortunate enough to spend five out of seven days for ten weeks of this summer in the beautifully, chilly Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse State Archives Building, working as an intern with the Maryland State Archives' Reference Department, where the stacks are always kept at 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 55% relative humidity.

The Maryland State Archives (originally the Maryland Hall of Records) was established in 1935, with a mission of preserving the state's permanent government records (as well as certain special collections pertinent to the state) and facilitating public access to these materials. The Archives has grown since its inception, housing millions of records both at the primary Papenfuse Building, and the Archives' off-site Baker Building. The primary purpose of the Archives has remained largely unchanged, though practices, duties, and auxiliary efforts have certainly expanded and evolved in the past ninety years. I've had the opportunity to be one small part of these many efforts over the past few weeks. This article's intrepid writer is pictured above right, undertaking the return of a book twice the size of her head.

Working in the Reference Department, I have performed a variety of tasks to aid Reference Services in our goal of making records accessible to the public. The Reference Department is an absolutely essential part of the Archives, as we handle a vast majority of the public's inquiries and research, whatever that may entail. Genealogists, government employees, people needing proof of a name change or legal proceeding, academics or graduate students, or even just curious tourists will all liaise with reference personnel as we provide to them whatever assistance is possible.

I worked shifts in the front lobby of the Archives, usually multiple times a week, registering patrons and helping to facilitate their research in what ways I was able. Busy days might see upwards to two dozen patrons entering in the span of just a few hours, which is a lot for an archive with only a dozen tables available for public use at any given time. Every visitor entering our search room, where all public research at the Archives is done, must fill out our researcher's agreement with their basic personal information and a pledge to respect certain policies (ex: bringing no food and drink into the search room, keeping records in original order, leaving their bags, folders and pens in a locker) either in advance of an appointment, or more commonly upon entering the building. I helped guide patrons through this process, and ensured that everyone entering properly observed and respected our policies.

Some patrons were repeat visitors who may have been regularly visiting for longer than I have been alive; these researchers usually breezed on through in just a few minutes, intimately familiar with the rhythm of signing in: security desk, photo ID, logbook, visitor sticker, filling out the researchers' agreement, placing belongings in a locker, and heading into our search room to start work. Other patrons may be less familiar with the process of visiting the Archives, and would need more assistance. I walked patrons through the registration process, at times stepping in to aid those who may be unable to complete it independently due to unfamiliarity with computers or a disability. I honed my multitasking skills, checking in multiple patrons simultaneously while also fielding questions from others or attending to other pressing matters.

Over the dozens of hours I spent at the front desk, I also processed purchases of USB drives and books from our lobby, answered what questions I could about the archives and materials visitors hoped to view, and helped patrons place orders. On occasion I unfortunately was the one to inform patrons that we were unlikely to be able to help them accomplish certain tasks, in which event I attempted to provide what guidance I could as to where their efforts may better be directed, such as providing them with the contact information of another government agency like the Division of Vital Records.

This aspect of my role provided me with useful customer service experience and improved my interpersonal skills, working with people from all walks of life with a wide variety of needs and attitudes. For the past year I've worked at St. John's College's Greenfield Library, where I also work shifts at the circulation desk, but interacting with college students and faculty (a majority of whom I know personally) in an academic library can be very different from working with the broad spectrum of patrons that the Archives receives. I did deal with a few difficult situations, including a handful of upset or distressed patrons, but these were good learning experiences, and luckily made up only a small and manageable fraction of my work. A large majority of the people I encountered were nothing but polite, and it was very fulfilling to be able to assist patrons in finding what they were looking for and help them along their research journey.

During quiet periods in the lobby, or at other times without more pressing tasks, I worked on digital record orders. The Maryland State Archives provides scans of many different kinds of records in our collections for patrons who may need a certified copy for legal purposes, who are unable to visit us in person to view records, or who simply desire the record search process to be streamlined for them via assistance from archival staff. I worked on reference requests for vital records– certificates for deaths, births, and marriages, with death records being the most commonly ordered. Uncertified orders I filled entirely on my own, sending a digital file with its citation after locating it amongst our collections. Certified orders require a certification (as may be expected) from a full-time archivist before a physical copy is mailed to the patron, but I did at times perform the research for these orders and send a digital copy in advance of certification from another staff member. On a few occasions this involved files not yet scanned into our digital collections, and thus I needed to locate and scan the physical record myself. Certified orders may also entail more complex research than uncertified orders, so there were instances where I found myself paging through a year's worth of Baltimore County marriage records or something of the sort, looking for a record the patron did not provide a specific date for.

My personal favorite duty as a reference intern was record retrievals and returns. When patrons visited the archive, they may either request records to be pulled for them in advance of an appointment, or else after arriving may fill out a retrieval slip, upon which I would take a cart and head back into the stacks. The archives has a shelving capacity of more than thirty miles, holds millions of records, and, while well-catalogued, is not organized in any consistent order as a library or even a smaller archival collection may be. There is no Dewey decimal system or alphabetical organization, for browsing as in a library, instead the storage locations are recorded in the Archives' vast catalogs. A single shelf may contain equity records from 1805, next to a set of ephemera from 1722, legal files from 1961, a set of library books in the process of being reshelved, and a few 19th century art prints. Often a shelf was not so drastically mismatched, so to speak, but all this is to say that finding records could sometimes become a slight adventure if they could not be found at a provided location.



Record retrievals might sometimes take two minutes, only involving walking a cart back a few yards and pulling a book off the shelf, but other times would involve speaking to different departments, cross-referencing record information to ensure that a record with a missing label was what the patron requested, or working out how to safely pull a twenty pound box from a top shelf without jeopardizing myself or the record. Pictured at left is a full cart of records ready to be brought out to a waiting patron. The mixture of some light physical labor and need for problem-solving makes it an enjoyable and fulfilling part of working in reference, and it was always rewarding to bring a cart full of records out to a waiting patron. At one point another intern at the archives brought up what parts of our roles had the potential to be automated, and I could proudly say that it would be impossible to automate pulling records.

Additionally, all interns at the archives received opportunities to hear about the roles of all the other departments. This was quite useful and edifying, and as a result of this I was able to assist with a project for another department as well for the final few weeks of my internship. The library collection of the archives is undergoing a full reorganization after the installment of new shelving and the hiring

of a new librarian at the start of this year. I worked with the archives' Librarian, Andy Yamazaki, to recatalogue library materials housed in pamphlet boxes and folders before moving them to the main shelves for better ease of access. This involved editing these items' catalogue records and printing new labels for them, before reshelving them alongside the other books. This was an interesting project to work on, especially as someone whose background is primarily public service in libraries, and I gained a better understanding of cataloging procedure from this experience.

Coming out of my time with the Reference Department, I'm not entirely certain I want to work in reference full time in the future. It can be a tough job, though very rewarding in turn. I hope to explore some more behind-the-scenes work in archives and libraries in the future so as to broaden my skillset and understanding of the many types of archival work. I know, however, that my work as a Reference Intern will serve as a good foundation for that exploration, and I am very glad that I have this experience as a (pardon the pun) point of reference.

In sum, my internship at the Maryland State Archives was a fulfilling, informative, and highly amelioratory experience that I truly enjoyed. I have gained a better grasp of archival and reference work and built practical skills relating to the field, as well as improved my general public service abilities and workplace interpersonal skills. I'm so grateful that I had the opportunity to participate in this internship, and I will think fondly of my time with the State Archives this summer for a very long time. I especially appreciate those whom I was lucky enough to work with and learn from in the Reference Department and other departments at the Archives, and the St. John's College Career Development Office for helping to facilitate this internship. I'm certain I'll return to the Archives for my own research quite soon!

Editorial Staff:
Elaine Rice Bachmann, State Archivist
Emily Oland Squires, Assistant State Archivist
Megan Craynon, Director, Special Collections & Library Services
V. Joyce Phelps II, Appraisal Archivist
Adam Gray, Accessibility Archivist

It is through generous donors that the Archives has been able to acquire and preserve many treasures of Maryland's history. Donations support our mission to preserve and make accessible the historic records of Maryland, as well as supporting the professional development of our staff. To donate visit the Friends of the Maryland State Archives website.

The Friends of the Maryland State Archives is a 501(c)3 organization and donations to it are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.