

CHRISTIAN COUNTY, MISSOURI CIRCUIT COURT RECORDS 1859 - 1899

Our ancestors were people before they were our ancestors. We tend to imagine divorce, debt, assault, harassment, peer pressure, substance abuse and nearly the whole range of weak and negative aspects of human nature to be exclusively modern. We are wrong.

For several years, the Local Records Preservation Program of the Missouri State Archives, a division of the Office of the Missouri Secretary of State has prepared the 19th century records of the Christian County Circuit Court for microfilming. As they did so, they indexed each file. The completed ninety seven reels of microfilm were returned to the Office of the Christian County Circuit Court Clerk in the winter of 2004/2005. With permission of the Circuit Court, Christian County Circuit Court Rick Lamb placed these records on long-term loan to the Christian County Library. Researchers can view the microfilm on the library's two microfilm readers or print copies on the library's reader-printer. The microfilms have been cataloged, labeled, and made available at the microfilm cabinets in the microfilm reading room.

The Christian County Courthouse burned in 1865. Most records created in the six years between the county's 1859 founding and 1865 were lost. Most deeds were re-registered. Many other records were not replaced after the loss.

To use and understand these records, nineteenth century laws and legal actions need to be viewed in nineteenth century context. Playing cards on Sunday, owning a pool table, marrying a spouse of another race, or building a weir (dam) that does not let the fish through for people downstream may not be charges seen in current court records, but they appear in 19th century records because laws at that time addressed issues we would do think of today as being legal problems or even of appropriate interest for non-participants. Other offenses could translate to current charges. Running a horse on a public road would be today's traffic violation. The most common charge of all in these records - back taxes - needs no translation.

Some terms may need explanations. Charges, actions or whatever reason for court action may be better understood by viewing the Action files. Seeing only the word Worship, Family, or Person, may not convey that the charge is actually "Disturbing the Peace in a Place of Worship," "Disturbing the Peace of a Family" or "Disturbing the Peace of a Person". In the defendant or plaintiff indexes, the word house or road or highway may not be understood to state a charge of robbery or burglary. The word weapon may mean possessing, displaying or threatening someone with a weapon. In addition to finding fuller listing of the reason of the charge or lawsuit, you may want to use the indexes along with one of the on-line legal dictionaries such as Law Dictionary <http://www.wvlia.org/diction.htm>; Law.com <http://dictionary.law.com/>, or Nolo Glossary <http://www.nolo.com/glossary.cfm> .

Loose records of the Christian County Circuit Court are located in boxes, each with numbered files. These boxes are in neither chronological nor alphabetical order. The microfilm is in the same order as the boxes and files. Locating information requires indexes. There are five types of indexes. Box and Range simply lists files found in the order in which they are stored and microfilmed. The Action index is a listing first by the reason the case was being heard in court, then by the date in which the case was filed. The Plaintiff and Defendant reports are alphabetical lists of the party bringing suit and the one being charged . Additional "Actions" include declaration of intent to become a

citizen, partition of an estate, appointment to a job with the circuit court, and various actions of the Circuit Court which may pertain to civil, criminal or simply official cases. The microfilm index is a cross-match of the box and file to the reel of microfilm on which it appears. Box and Range, Action, Plaintiff and Defendant indexes are broken into smaller files for quicker internet loading. Even so, dial-up connections may find some files so large that they load slowly. To print these PDF files, set all margins at .5" and select Landscape rather than Portrait.

See information and PDF order forms for buying local records microfilm reels may be purchased from the Missouri State Archives at:
<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/county/croll.asp>.

The easiest and best use of the indexes and microfilm would be to find records of interest on the indexes, bring lists of those to the library and look at the records on the microfilm. The reader printer is coin operated, accepting only the quarter cost per copy. Library hours are 8:30 to 8:00 Monday through Thursday and 8:30 to 5:00 on Friday and Saturday, with early closing at 3:00 on Saturday between Memorial Day and Labor Day. The microfilm is also available to use at the State Archives in Jefferson City. If you cannot visit either the library or the archives personally, having someone else look at the records for you is the second quickest, most complete way of finding multiple records. If coming to the library or archives is not possible, you need to send a SASE to Christian County Library, 1005 N 4th Ave, Ozark, MO 65721. Give the Box and File numbers and all information from the index to help us identify what you are seeking. Minimum charges for research is \$1. This will pay for up to four photocopies, and one stamp will cover shipment of four copies. As the index does not indicate the length of each file and the length does vary, four copies may include multiple files or not be all of a single file. If a file is longer than four pages, we will tell you how many additional pages are in the file when we return the first four pages. The library will not attempt to maintain records of what photocopies an individual has requested. Please make clear which records and pages are being requested. Library staffing is limited. **NO MORE THAN TWO FILES PER PERSON PER WEEK** will be attempted by library staff.

If you enjoy and appreciate access to these records, pass your thanks on. Local Field Archivist Linda Myers and her assistant Paul Barker prepared these files as well as the papers for microfilming. The grant which paid for the project is funded by one dollar user fees collected by County Recorder of Deeds on filings of permanent records, a program authorized by the Missouri Legislature. Among many others responsible are current Circuit Clerk Richard D. Lamb; former Circuit Clerks Susan Spence and Bruce Harris; present and former Circuit Judges James Eiffert, Anthony McConnell, Mitch Hough, John Waters, and Mark Orr; current Recorder of Deeds Roy Meadows and former Recorder of Deeds Bruce Harris; Local Records Program Director, Lynn Morrow; State Archivist Kenneth Winn; current Secretary of State, Robin Carnahan and former Secretary of State, now Governor, Matt Blunt; and state representatives and senators who authorized the program.