

Maryland State Archives Website Decoded



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Understanding the Archives

Before using the the Maryland State Archives (MSA) website at <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/>, it is important to understand what a state archive can and cannot do.

- This archive is a typical repository; the website is constructed according to how archivists accession (organize) their record collections (not like a name-searchable subscription website).
- Like many government-funded repositories, MSA has a limited budget. Because of this, there are not many viewable online records on the website. With few exceptions (ex: [Archives of Maryland Online](#)), **there are no fill-in-the-name search engine options at the website.**
- If you see that a record is “digitized,” that digital image is most likely only available for viewing on the in-house computers. **But more are coming online every day – click all links!**
- **The website has online indexes**, but very few of the original records you want are viewable online. **The website is designed for you to know what is available at the Archives so that you may order it later** ([via the website](#) or in person).
- **Viewing Originals.** Use the Call Slip forms to order in-house retrievals of original records, special collections, or books not available on the first-floor shelves. Return the slip to the archivist to check and complete the order.
- **Printing & Copying.** No photocopiers are available at MSA. Copies of digital scans can be done from the computers for \$1 per page. Certified copies must be requested through the archivist, fees vary and are subject to change. No fees are collected to take photos with your camera; a camera stand is available.

MSA uses its own archival system of identifying, cataloging, and obtaining records; know these terms:

Series ID (also called MSA Citation or MSA Collection Number)	Identifying letters & numbers for specific record groups. ID changes if the records are stored as paper, microfilmed, or digital images, even for same record. Ex: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Baltimore County Wills, 1666-1979, <u>paper</u>: C435▪ Baltimore County Wills, 1666-1979, <u>microfilm</u>: CM188
Microfilm numbers	Microfilms are preceded by a CR or SR designation, then between three to five numbers. Microfilms that are not scanned must be requested to be scanned for later viewing; there are no microfilm readers on-site.
Card Catalogs	Physical card catalogs are available at MSA. Many are available for at-home viewing, use the online “ Checklist of Indices .”
Legacy Accession number	The Legacy Accession (found in catalog) basically represent what other archives call a “Record Group” designation and can be added to your citation. <i>They are usually the same as the original Series ID for the paper collections of a particular record set.</i>
Location numbers	For textual/paper records still in original form, you will need to order using its description and location number, in the form of 00/00/00/000. This indicates the shelf and box numbers for archivists to retrieve the record. Not all paper records may be retrievable if there is an acceptable digitized surrogate.

RECORD FORMATS & SERIES ID



Paper records



Microfilmed records



Digital records

A Series ID number changes to define both the record and the format.

Easy Start: Guide to Government Records Tab

The easiest way to enter the records sections of the website is the second box under “Quick Links” titled “Guide to Government Records.” First, we will explore the “Records and Research” tab. Later, “Choose your Display Type” will be our focus. We will address a few of the other tabs as well.

Guide to Government Records



Reference and Research Tab

[The Reference and Research page](#) is the first stop for any Maryland researcher. This section is filled with hotlinks to commonly used record groups, such as [birth](#), [death](#), [marriage](#), [indicies](#), and more. Links will take you to pages that describe the records available through MSA. Read the introductions and contextual background to record groups carefully and completely. *Note that not all records are represented, some counties have retained a number of vital or court records – always check county courthouses or historical societies if you are not finding what you need (example: [Harford County](#) has a series of rescued original early court records at their historical society that are not duplicated at the MSA).*

Maryland State Archives Guide to Government Records

[Home](#)[Introduction](#)[Reference and Research](#)[How To Place An Order](#)[Background](#)[Advanced Search](#)

Accessioning & Choose Your Display Type

The MSA website record descriptions mirror the archival accessioning process. Navigation starts with a large description of records and from there the record groups are divided and subdivided until the individual record can be located. **Think of it like opening a series of six or more boxes, one set into the next, with each box becoming smaller and smaller, and so on. Your goal is to find a specific description of the individual record, needed to order the record online or in person.**



From the [Guide to Government Records](#) page, you are taken to a display of records categorized by their jurisdiction: state or county. *If you are searching for a Baltimore tax record from 1804, your steps may look like this:*

1. Choose the **Display Type** (or the way you will search). For this example, choose “**By Record Type.**”

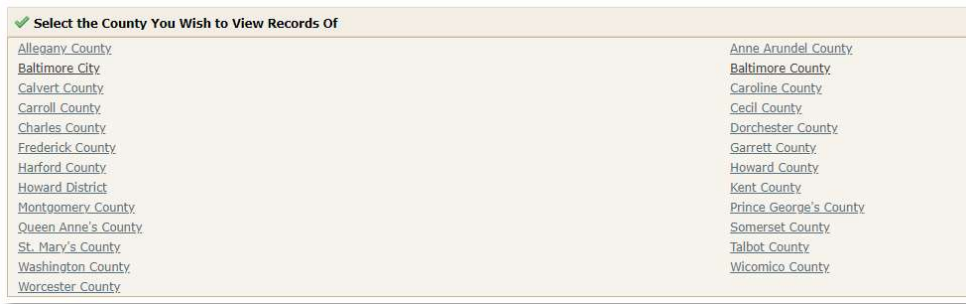
✓ **Choose by Record Type**

- **County Agency Series Edition** (Also known as **Coagser**)
Listing of all accessioned series from county jurisdictions. Under each county are listed agencies, series, date spans, and series numbers.

[Original County Records](#) | [County Records on Microfilm](#) | [County Records on Digital Media](#)

2. The next page gives you options for the agency or jurisdiction level (county, state-level, transferred, municipal, or Baltimore City Archives). For this example, we choose **County**. Within the county section area, we next choose the **media** (if you want to search original paper holdings, microfilms, or digital images of records). Next, we click “**County Records on Microfilm.**”

3. Choose the county you wish to investigate (Baltimore County for this example).



4. The next page separates the records into lists by the name of the government agency that created the records. Scroll down to “**Commissioners of the Tax.**” (This page works much like the [FamilySearch catalog](#)).
5. As you scroll down, the listings under Commissioner of the Tax shows a description of the record and the time period the records were created. For this example, choose “**Commissioners of the Tax (Assessment Record) CM 1203, 1804-1823.**”
6. The next page is a description of this particular record set, divided by book, year, or location (towns or hundreds). **IF you were at MSA at their in-house computers, you would next choose the “Links” to take you to the film.** For this example, the series number for assessment (tax) records is CM 1203. For our example, we would choose 1804 for the “**Delaware Lower and Upper Hundreds**” which is film CR 39605-3 (“-3” means it is the third item on the film). **Make note of the series ID, description, and film number to view at MSA or [order a copy](#) of via the website.**

Records on the website are categorized by jurisdiction (circuit court, board of health, etc.) and described by title. Click on the titles to find descriptions or drill down to individual records. This process is much like using the online [FamilySearch Catalog](#).

RESEARCH LIST

Research Subject	Record	Record Format	MSA Series ID
David Hope	Death in 1895	Digital	SE 58
Bett Brashears	Probate 1815	Paper	C2119-34

Make a research list before you go to MSA to use your research time more effectively.

Maryland State Archives – In Person

The excellent Maryland in-house archivists are generally very friendly and knowledgeable. You may need to wait in line to speak to them however, try to visit mid-week when attendance at MSA is usually lower.

Three types of call slip are used to order record retrievals: Government Records (yellow), Library and Periodicals (green), and Special Collections (white). Most often you will use the yellow call slip to order original records pulled. From the computer description, note the jurisdiction (level of government), agency, record type, Series ID (MSA Collection Number), any box/folder/case numbers or years, and the location number (00/00/00/000). Have the archivist check your slip before turning it in. Handouts for using microfilm viewers and finding death certificates are available at the archivists' desk.

Level of Government (i.e. State, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City)	Baltimore City
Agency (i.e. Secretary of State, Circuit Court, Register of Wills.)	Superior Court
Record (i.e. Assessment Record, Marriage Certificate, Wills)	Chancery Papers
MSA Collection Number (i.e. S31-2, T2691-45)	C 168 - 11
Box/Book/Liber Folder/Case Number/Personal Name	Case C156 12/13/1851
Location (i.e. 1/11/8/45)	Graff v. Bray & Haig 02/15/14/054
MESSAGE TO RESEARCHER	

Other Maryland Sources In-House:

- **Special Collections.** See the Topic File Index at <http://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/viewer.aspx?page=spectopic>.

Digital Images Available from Home

There are a few places on the website or on sister-sites that hold digital images where Maryland records are easily accessed:

- **MSA Guide to Family History Research,** <http://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/viewer.aspx?page=genstart>. Explains first steps to researching in the website.
- **MSA Guide to Special Collections,** <http://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/speccol/index.aspx>. Special collections are private papers – newspapers, manuscripts, maps, and more. They must be ordered at the Archives, and you might want to call ahead before you go to see if they are off campus and need a day or two to retrieve. The topic file has both personal names and topical subjects. Some are occasionally digitized, including some religious records. Search by denomination or location.
- **Colonial Probate Index, 1634-1777,** <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/stagsere/se1/se4/000000/html/index.html>.
- **Archives of Maryland Online,** <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/html/index.html>. The website is a bit dated, but very useful. Archives of Maryland Online provides access to over 400,000 documents including legal, military, a few city directories, and more. Records may be images

or transcriptions. This site is very helpful for colonial research. You should investigate the separate record types, **but you can also type in names** in the upper right corner at “Search entire site for:”

- **“Search Online Records,”** https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/homepage/html/online_records.html. A little-used resource is this section with links to a number of resources, like the [Legacy of Slavery Database](#) (keyword searchable).
- **Baltimore City Archives,** <https://baltimorecityhistory.net/>. This website features unique records for Baltimore City from the early 1800s. From the home page, click on “[Research at the Baltimore City Archives](#).” A wealth of information is here, scroll down to “Specific Topics and Records.” Some have been digitized, for example all of the War of 1812 records are fully accessible in series [BRG22](#).
- **Online Digitized Newspapers,** <http://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/newspaper/digitized.aspx>. This is a small collection and not word-searchable but may help for small-town papers.
- **MDLandRec, A Digital Image Retrieval System for Land Records & Indices,** <https://mdlandrec.net/>. **Maryland boasts as the only state with all of its land records online.** Early indexes and records on this site are used like microfilm; early deed records are not name-searchable. Once the record is found in the index, the book and page are easy to jump to.
- **Plats.net,** <http://plats.net/pages/index.aspx>. Includes maps and hand-drawn plats from early records.

Other Maryland Sources Online:

- **“Digitized Baltimore City Directories,”** *University of Maryland, University Libraries, Research Guides,* <https://lib.guides.umd.edu/c.php?g=327119&p=2197762>.
- **Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Department,** <https://www.prattlibrary.org/locations/maryland/>. Enoch Pratt is considered the state library. Its Maryland Room has a large collection of Maryland books & indexes for genealogists. See also the “Research Databases,” <https://www.prattlibrary.org/research/database/>. Card-holding members can access the free newspapers.
- **FamilySearch,** *Maryland Historical Records Collections,* <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection>. Early Register of Wills records are online (microfilm, not name-searchable) for almost every county. Other records are also available, see the [Catalog](#) for specific counties and topics. Links to digitized microfilms are included.
- **Maryland Genealogical Society,** <https://mdgensoc.org/>. Members-only databases include will and probate indexes, church abstracts, surname files, tax lists, and back-issues of the *Maryland Journal*.
- **Maryland Historical Society,** <https://www.mdhs.org>. User-friendly catalog.
- **MDGenWeb,** <http://www.mdgenweb.org/>. Indexes provided by volunteers; information varies by county.

Understanding Court Book Numbering

Except for rare collections of original deeds held at the state archives or county courthouses, property, court, and probate transactions were recorded into books by clerks of court. **Maryland has a unique numbering system for county deed books that may be unfamiliar to people from other areas.**

Once a document was introduced to the Register of Deeds, Probate Court, or other court for recording, county clerks recopied the information into their own record books. In general, each set of books created by a clerk of the county court labeled the books first by his initials, then started with deed book number one. When a new clerk took over, often that new official would name the next book series by his initials *and then start again* with book number one. Therefore, in a single county, one may find deed books from 1800-1830 labeled, as an example, ABC 1, ABC 2, ABC 3, and so on as each record book filled and until the end of his tenure. Then from 1831-1860, the new clerk handing the next deed books may be label them by his initials and number, such as XYZ 1, XYZ 2, XYZ 3, etc. To further confuse the issue, modern clerks may also have renumbered the entire system so that, for example, a book originally labeled as XYZ 3 (1851-1860) may now be county deed book 6. When looking for deeds in a county, take particular note of the time period for that book series.

Example of clerk book numbering systems in Maryland

The dates and initials here are for example only, actual clerk book series dates will vary.

County X Clerk initials ABC

1800–1830



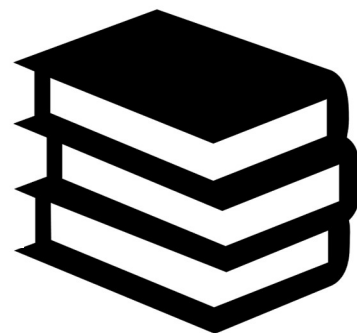
Book ABC 1 • 1800–1810

Book ABC 2 • 1811–1820

Book ABC 3 • 1821–1830

County X Clerk initials XYZ

1831–1860



Book XYZ 1 • 1831–1840

Book XYZ 2 • 1841–1850

Book XYZ 3 • 1851–1860

County X • Modern Renumbering • 1800–1860

Book ABC 1 • 1800–1810 **now found as** Book 1

Book ABC 2 • 1811–1820 **now found as** Book 2

Book ABC 3 • 1821–1830 **now found as** Book 3

Book XYZ 1 • 1831–1840 **now found as** Book 4

Book XYZ 2 • 1841–1850 **now found as** Book 5

Book XYZ 3 • 1851–1860 **now found as** Book 6

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Notes
