

LANCASTER VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Mary Ball Washington Museum & Library, Inc.

Capital Campaign for New, Expanded LVHS Genealogy & History Library
Funding Goal: \$750,000



ABOUT US

Mary Ball Washington Museum & Library, Inc., now operating as Lancaster Virginia Historical Society, was founded in 1958 to provide a museum, library, and community organization dedicated to discovering, collecting, preserving, understanding, interpreting, and sharing the history and genealogy of Lancaster County, Virginia and its surrounding regions. The library was originally located in the old jail and twice moved into larger spaces in the courthouse village. It is currently located in a leased, former real estate office across the street from Lancaster House, which houses the museum.

OUR LIBRARY

Lancaster County has unbroken records since its formation in 1651 and has long been an attraction for academic and family researchers, particularly those interested in colonial and revolutionary Virginia. The library has an extensive collection of materials related to those early periods, while its complete historical and genealogical holdings span the 17th to 20th centuries and have been ever-growing in scope and volume since the library's founding. The focus on Lancaster County is augmented by materials on other counties in the original Northern Neck Proprietary and areas where Virginia families typically migrated. The collection currently includes more than 9,000 books, manuscripts, periodicals, microfilms, published court records, unpublished research notes, loose paper files, electronic resources, census reports, church and cemetery records, county histories, and vital records of births, marriages, and deaths. An online card catalog, searchable by surname, keyword, title, and author, is publicly accessible on the library's website.

Over the last 60 years, the library's dedicated staff and volunteers have assembled an outstanding body of information on the people, places, and stories of the lower Northern Neck of Virginia and created unique indexes and finding aids for the collection. For example, the "Surname Index Card File" is a pre-computer labor of love with hundreds of thousands of hand-written entries cross-referenced with the library shelves. Hundreds of "Family Files" containing genealogy charts and notes shared by other researchers are constantly being expanded. Recent projects have also contributed to new resources for understanding African-American genealogy. The library is truly a treasure of historic knowledge for Virginia. However, the existing facilities have become crowded and outdated, ceasing to be hospitable for visitors and volunteers alike.



THE NEW LIBRARY:

In 2017, the Museum and Library became aware of the opportunity to acquire a building immediately adjacent to its existing campus, favorably located on the same side of the street. It is part of the Lancaster Court House Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Landmarks Register. The renovation of this 1930-40s building, formerly the Chilton residence, as the new Genealogy and History Library will provide a modern, attractive, and highly workable space for all users. A noted local architect, Randall Kipp, developed plans for the building. In August 2023, Dilday Builders Inc. was hired as the general contractor and renovation work began.

The new facility will double the size of the library, including space for the continued growth of the collections as new sources of data are located and additional research is performed by library volunteers. No other institution or online site provides comparable materials or services. The Lancaster Community Library in Kilmarnock, for example, offers general library amenities but does not focus on history or genealogical resources. Director Alice Cooper says, “We always refer these questions to the Mary Ball Washington Library as its collection and personnel are able to provide accurate and quality assistance on the history, people, and genealogy of our county.”

THE IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Lancaster Virginia Historical Society has the special responsibility of keeping and sharing nearly four centuries of Lancaster County’s history and memories. The library’s rich holdings relate to many of our nation’s founding families and also to everyday men and women of all backgrounds who shaped the fabric of our communities.

The new library facility will be freely available to all local residents and visitors, and will offer each family the opportunity to discover their roots, learn about their community heritage, and understand how the past influences their society today. The expanded space and improved infrastructure will provide many benefits, including enabling the library to:

- ◆ Enhance and expand programs, services, and operations.
- ◆ Serve a greater number of people and wider audiences.
- ◆ Augment the collections with relevant new materials and maintain holdings that rival many larger academic institutions.
- ◆ Foster independent and collaborative research, original scholarship, and publication projects.
- ◆ Meet 21st-century internet and technology needs, including a dedicated media lab for oral histories and microfilm digitization.
- ◆ Host small training workshops and educational programs, which currently must be held off-site.
- ◆ Strengthen school partnerships and engage students in research projects that meet new SOL performance assessments and build critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.
- ◆ Assist the County Clerk of Court Office, which maintains the original court record books, by answering inquiries referred by the clerk and helping researchers plan their courthouse visits.
- ◆ Enrich the cultural assets of the Court House Historic District and support additional heritage tourism to the County.

YOUR ROLE

Your generous gift for the new LVHS Genealogy and History Library will be greatly appreciated and will make an impact today and for generations to come. The Capital Campaign Committee welcomes the opportunity to speak with you about your tax-deductible financial donation, in-kind contribution, securities gift, multi-year pledge, or estate bequest. For further information, please contact executive director Karen Hart at 804-462-7280 or history@LancasterVaHistory.org.

