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Cumberland County Preserves Historic Colonial Documents

Carlisle, PA – Residents who want to learn more about Cumberland County’s history can now view more than 10,650 preserved original colonial documents from 1761-1776 on [Cumberland County’s Archival website](#). The project was made possible by a \$15,000 Records Care Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) and matched by Cumberland County, with Records Improvement Funds. The two year grant complimented a larger preservation project to preserve the Prothonotary’s civil case documents from 1750, the founding year of Cumberland County, to 1776.

“Many of the documents transferred to the Archives, including Appearance Docket Papers for civil cases come to us folded, dirty, and torn,” said Cumberland County Archivist Barbara Bartos, who supervised the project. “The records have been moved several times since 1750, have been through fires, and were in desperate need of preservation.”

Merri Lou Schaumann, a local historian familiar with colonial court documents and county history, implemented the project by cleaning, flattening, inventorying, and placing the documents in acid-free folders and boxes. Not part of the grant, Archives staff scanned the documents, to have back-up copies, and provide residents with online access.

The documents contain historic information not found elsewhere. Numerous cases document the early law careers of [George Ross](#), [James Smith](#), and James Wilson, three signers of the Declaration of Independence who practiced law in Cumberland County. Wilson also signed the United States Constitution.

In addition to aiding with genealogical research, an overall pattern of the documents shows the colonial period in the county as a debt economy. These early documents also reveal the area as a trading center, including many cases involving George Croghan, an Irish immigrant, Indian

Trader, and land speculator who launched one of the largest and most effective British trade networks in America in the 1740s. Cases decreased from 1758 to 1760 and reflect the unsettled period due the French and Indian War.

Cumberland County originally comprised land that stretched to the western Pennsylvania border and the County Archives holds civil cases from numerous counties beyond present-day Cumberland County. In 1770 Cumberland County included parts of Armstrong, Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Fayette, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Huntingdon, Indiana, Mifflin, Perry, Snyder, Somerset, Union, Washington, and Westmoreland.

A number of documents have been discovered for sale on eBay, as well as in private collections. Possessing legal county records is unlawful and any information to assist the county in recovering documents that belong to the citizens of Cumberland County is appreciated. For more information, contact the Cumberland County Archives 717.240.7886.

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