

DIGITIZING CIVIL WAR DOCUMENTS

For more than a decade, the Missouri State Archives has been creating digital copies of historic photographs, maps and documents in its collection. The process of digitizing records of lasting historic value helps make them more easily accessible to the public.

By placing digital images on the Missouri Digital Heritage website, the archives is making these important resources available to any researcher with a computer and an internet connection. The digitization process has also made virtual copies of documents that can be used in presentations, programs and exhibits.



Imaging technician Stacy White uses a planetary scanner to make a digital copy of a Civil War document.
Missouri State Archives



Above: Many Civil War-era documents have been stored in tri-folded bundles for decades. Right: These folded and grimy documents are gently cleaned and flattened before being re-filed in large acid-free folders. Volunteers across Missouri donate thousands of hours, helping archivists in the massive effort to preserve these documents.
Missouri State Archives

Below: Archivists use humidity and gentle pressure to flatten documents that have been folded for more than a century.
Missouri State Archives



PRESERVING CIVIL WAR ERA COURT CASES

The Missouri State Archives was awarded a \$330,619 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to make St. Louis Circuit Court cases related to the Civil War available to the public in time for the war's sesquicentennial in 2011. In making the award, NEH named this archival and conservation work a "We the People" project. This is a special designation for efforts that significantly advance the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.

The more than 230,000 St. Louis court documents from the Civil War era demonstrate how litigation exploded during the period. NEH-funded archivists examined more than 11,000 cases that were filed between 1866 and 1868. Many of those cases involved citizens who sued for property confiscated or damaged by troops and bushwhackers. Others contested the suspension their civil rights and liberties, especially through the administration of loyalty oaths. Several of the documents preserved in the project appear in this exhibit.

LOCAL RECORDS PROGRAM

The Missouri State Archives Local Records Program helps local government agencies evaluate and preserve documents in their collection. Field archivists work closely with local officials to sort through old files and boxes to determine which documents should be microfilmed, which ones should be preserved and which should be discarded.

Occasionally Local Records archivists uncover long-forgotten gems like the Civil War era map of Palmyra shown below. The dirty and brittle map was treated in the State Archives' conservation lab in Jefferson City. The newly-cleaned map shows amazing details about Palmyra during the war years. The infamous Palmyra Massacre, in which Union soldiers executed ten Confederate prisoners on October 18, 1862, took place at the fairgrounds that are shown at the far right of the map.

