

# Collaboration in the Courthouse Archives: Building a Digital Archive of Legal Records That Illuminate Local Stories of Displacement

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**Abstract:** Exploring Rockingham's Past (ERP) is an ongoing collaboration between JMU's History Department, JMU library staff, and the Circuit Court Clerk of Rockingham County. One year ago, a history graduate student began a summer internship in the Courthouse archives under the guidance of the Clerk and a history professor. Library staff provided space, equipment, and mentorship for what became an ambitious digitization project. The inaugural ERP collection consists of 6,207 digitized legal documents from the 1930s that reveal 364 stories surrounding Virginia's condemnation of private land within Rockingham County to create the Shenandoah National Park (SNP). The intern used Adobe Acrobat to combine and compress the lossless TIFF files into 364 case files. Acrobat was also used to perform text recognition. These digital documents have been released into the public domain as keyword searchable and fully described PDFs. They are available at <https://omeka.jmu.edu/erp/>. This presentation will examine the strategies and efforts behind the project. It will describe a large public event where the Clerk, SNP staff, descendants of displaced families, and JMU folks came together to announce the project, share the documents, and engage in some emotional truth and reconciliation. JMU faculty in partnership with the Clerk have received grant funds to continue the program and build out the ERP collection. Three additional Virginia county Clerk of Court offices as well as the Shenandoah National Park want to add their condemnation records to the collection. We are researching grant opportunities to support these collaborations.

## About the Author:

*Kevin Hegg* is a veteran IT professional and heroic problem solver with a humanities degree from the University of Wyoming. After supervising a team of software developers and systems administrators for nearly two decades, he now serves as Director of Digital Projects in the JMU Libraries. In this position, he works closely with faculty and students engaged in established and emerging forms of scholarship. Kevin is currently exploring ways to use machine learning to describe archival content. Current interests include Python, GIS, cloud computing, and biking.