

Mrs. Lynda Updike

President: Southampton County Historical Society

Dear Mrs. Updike,

As you may know, the Brantley Association of America, which I head, has undertaken the project to digitize and to facilitate the indexing of the early court records of Southampton County for the purpose of genealogy research as well as the advancement of historical research in the county. While the digitizing of these records is nearing completion, the indexing of these will take a monumental effort. There are some 58,000 pages of which will be abstracted, hundreds of thousands of name entries and the many landmarks identified in the various deed records. The names will include every man, woman and child identified therein from 1749 through the mid 1880s. The records include, Will Books, Court Order Books, Court Minute Books, Deed Books and Marriage Books as well as other, miscellaneous, documents. While it is a sizeable elephant, we are very encouraged with the progress seen in the first few weeks. Although we have not formally announced the project until this writing, we have digitized over 46,000 images and have acquired volunteers to index 11 of the some 120 court books. This represents nearly 10% of the indexing required and we reiterate that these volunteers have responded only from “word of mouth” and since we first arrived in Courtland on February 11<sup>th</sup>.

We are hopeful that members of the Southampton County Historical Society will want to join in this remarkable project. Southampton County will, as far as I know, be the first County in America to have all its records indexed from the mid 1700s through 1880. We are appreciative of the insight and support of Probate Officer and Clerk, Mr. Richard Francis who is a native of this early Virginia County and recognizes the potential discovery of historical sites and the identity of many persons otherwise lost in the presently un-indexed records, found particularly in the Court Order and Minute books.

Realizing the valiant effort of the participants, Mr. Francis has stated that within the covers of the respective court books, will be forever shown the names of the participants who take part in the great undertaking. Along with the ancient clerks and Court Officers whose entries go back to 1749, will be noted those who will have labored to bring from obscurity, many names, families and landmarks of early Southampton County. It is fascinating enough to be able to read and extract the names from the early books and to get a glimpse of the lives and events of our forefathers here, but to be able to become part of history ourselves by this effort and the recognition of the custodians of these remarkable records, is truly astonishing.

We are truly appreciative of Society member Bruce Saunders who has been “on seen” with us since our arrival and has guided us in locating the older books. Her diligence in maintaining a log of the books and pages digitized has been an important element during the project and her efforts have expedited the work. Bruce and Mr. Francis are among those who have volunteered to be “Book Project Managers” and will index, themselves, at least one book each. These are among the same books which have lain in the Courthouse, without and index, for well over 250 years.

We formally solicit the assistance also of your members, the members of the Southampton County Yahoo Group and other interested parties associated with the Historical Society. Please provide our e-mail and mailing address to these and make this letter available on your WEB site. We do hope many will take part in this historic venture.

Sincerely,

*J. Kenneth Brantley*

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