

The Winding Roads to Equity

*An Archival Research Endeavor of the Albemarle County
Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes, 1921-1949*

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Executive Summary

In partnership with Jordy Yager and the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, this archival research endeavor sought to aid the Mapping Cville project in its goal to analyze the landscape established by racial covenants and reinforced by governmental action in the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, in order to bring to light evidence of the specific and targeted denial of infrastructural improvements to African American residents in the 1920s and the lasting impacts of racially biased planning practices on African American residents in our region. Mapping Cville also aims to show that the lack of investments in infrastructure designed to mitigate or remove health hazards and/or to increase the quality of life specifically in majority Black neighborhoods in Charlottesville and Albemarle County during the 1920s and 1930s left these specific neighborhoods at risk during the urban renewal decimation practices of the 1960s and stunted residents' opportunities to build generational wealth.

Therefore, in order to further this goal, as well as to assist the Mapping Cville project in broadening its current scope of research, events from the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors' meeting minutes were logged and recorded in detail, with the ultimate goal of providing a structured record of all infrastructure spending and non-spending within the County. All records were cataloged in an Excel spreadsheet starting with the earliest digitized records available in 1921 and working forward thirty years, or three decades, through 1949.

The following is thus an attempt to contextualize the cataloged records, to present major infrastructural spending trends discovered in the recorded time frame, and to detail a few major storylines found throughout. Avenues for further research will also be discussed, in order that this work may be carried forward in the years to come.

Decision-Making Context

Organization of County Government & Service Provision

In the early 20th century, Albemarle County mirrored many of the qualities that defined local governance in Virginia at the time, including the separation of county governments from the independent cities, the influence of state power on local affairs, and the slow but steady progress toward the modernization of the structure and operation of government.

Since the 1870s, Albemarle County has been governed by a six-member Board of Supervisors, with a member representing each of the County's six magisterial districts: Charlottesville (now Rio), Ivy (now Jack Jouett), Rivanna, Samuel Miller, Scottsville, and White Hall districts. This structure provided a guaranteed degree of geographic representation for residents in the different districts, though attempts to reapportion or redistrict their boundaries appear to have been infrequent. These districts varied by their population, geography, and urbanization and also provided a basis for taxation for funding roads and schools.

However, it is worth noting that like much of Virginia, Albemarle County's political climate appears to have featured lengthy tenures of elected officials, a history of familial influence in local politics, and a dominance of the Democratic political machine. In fact, Edward Overman once wrote as much, in a 1940 review of Albemarle County government, wherein he proclaimed that "success in the Democratic Primary is equivalent to election. The selection of the men who are to run in the primaries with any chance of success has largely been made by a relatively small group of 'ins' or prominent citizens. Once a man is elected to an office he seldom has to give it up unless he himself decides to do so."¹ These elected officials included, for a time, five popularly elected officers (the Clerk of Court, Treasurer, Commissioner of the Revenue, Commonwealth's Attorney, and Sheriff) who comprised the core of the "courthouse ring" or "courthouse clique" that dominated local politics and were a key part of the patronage network.² On the State level, the Byrd organization courted rural voters through its control of the courthouse clique and policies friendly to rural areas.

Despite Albemarle being a predominantly rural county, the early 1930s did see some changes to Albemarle's organization and operations. In May, 1933, Albemarle voters supported a reorganization of the County government and adopted the County Executive form of government, which eliminated some of the popularly elected offices and removed some patronage influence by placing operation of the County government under the supervision of an appointed professional County Executive.³ The 1933 Sanitary District Act also allowed Albemarle to establish areas for the provision of urban services like water and sewer systems upon petition by residents of these areas. However, service provision remained fairly limited, reflecting the separation of rural counties and urban independent cities in Virginia.

Roads and Highways

A significant Byrd initiative that impacted local government and service provision was the 1932 Byrd Road Act, which transferred local responsibility for county roads to what is currently known as the Virginia Department of Transportation.⁴ This initiative aimed to reduce the rural counties' cost burden for maintaining these roads. The former county roads, which were constructed, managed, and maintained by County dollars and bonds, became part of the Secondary System of State Highways, and the debt service of the individual districts' road bonds were assumed by the County. Although the Board of Supervisors maintained the most control over which roads would be recommended for State maintenance, some degree of control was ceded to the state.

Citizens petitioned the Board of Supervisors to have roads established, closed, maintained, or later, taken into the State Highway system. Once a petition was made, the Board appointed a minimum of three viewers, who were resident freeholders – or landowning residents – of the County. The viewers were responsible for examining the area where the road was to be established, altered, or removed, and then

¹ Edward Samuel Overman, *Manager Government in Albemarle County, Virginia*, Report of the Bureau of Public Administration, Series B, No.6. University, Va: Division of Publications of the Bureau of Public Administration, 1940. <https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u1367009>. p.2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ Chapter 415, 1932 Acts of the Virginia General Assembly.

reporting on the road and feasibility or prudence of the petition in question. According to the Digest of the Laws of Virginia, published in 1841:

Where any person or persons shall make application to any county court, to have a new road opened, or a former one altered, within their county, for the convenience of traveling to their county courthouse, to any public warehouse, landing, ferry, mill, (2) coal mines, lead or ironworks, or to the seat of government, (4) they shall appoint three or more fit and able persons, to be sworn (7) before a justice of the peace, to view (6) the ground along which such road is proposed to be conducted, and to report to them, truly and impartially, the conveniences and inconveniences that will result, as well as to individuals as to the public, if such way shall be opened; and, where the application is to alter a former road, they shall also view the former road and report in like manner the comparative conveniences and inconveniences thereof.⁵

As such, the viewers were required to appear in person to assess the road, and report back to the Board on several factors which differed depending on the petitioner's request. Although it does not appear that viewers were required to interview landowners or residents affected during the viewing process, landowners were often subpoenaed to appear to also speak about the road in question. In the case that the petition requested establishment or closure of a road, the viewers were to assess the expediency of establishing or closing a road, the convenience or inconvenience of such a proposal to individuals and to the public, whether or not a garden or orchard would be affected, which landowners would be involved, and the viewers were also asked to provide a recommendation for the just compensation of those individuals if required. For roads being established, they were also required to include a map or diagram of the recommended route in their report.

In matters where petitioners requested roads be taken into the State Highway system, viewers reported on the number of households served, the amount of traffic that road served, the grading and drainage of the road or area, and the general condition of the road or route in question. Residents or the responsible developers were required to provide a clear right of way and to meet certain standards regarding the road's drainage and surfacing in order for the road to be taken into the State Highway system. The viewers thus concluded their reports with their recommendation on whether or not the road should in fact be taken into the system.

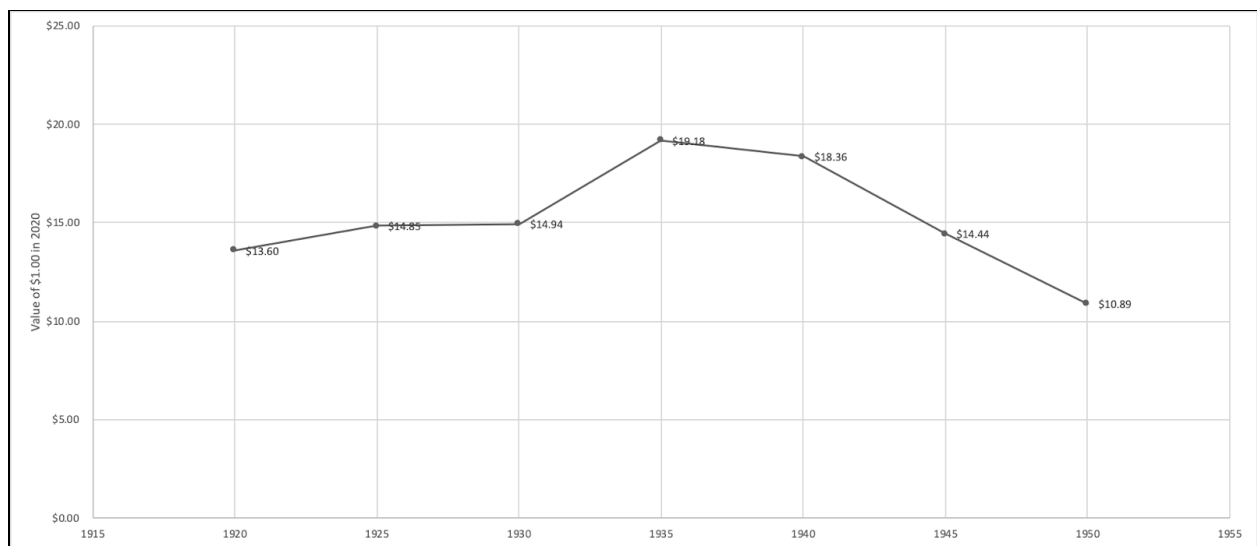
All viewer reports required approval by the Board in order to move forward; interestingly, in the aforementioned study period, the Board occasionally amended the viewers' report, but rarely rejected them. Once the report was approved, notices were posted in two places along the route and at the Court House in order to provide adequate information to all who may have a stake in the report or in any proposed changes. All affected landowners were typically also summoned to appear before the Board to make their case as to why the recommendations of the report should not be adopted.

⁵ Joseph Tate, "Digest of the Laws of Virginia, which are of a Permanent Character and General Operation; Illustrated by Judicial Decisions: To Which Is Added An Index of the Names of the Cases in the Virginia Reporter - Second Edition," *Richmond, Smith, and Palmer*, 1841, p. 798.

The Value of A Single Dollar - Contextualizing County Infrastructural Investments

To better interpret the motivations behind the Board’s decision-making, it was imperative to be able to appreciate the value of the currency at the time. This was crucial not only to contextualize infrastructural investments within today’s monetary framework, but also to understand how spending by year differed across the thirty year study period. Some crucial historical dates and periods which help to contextualize the currency fluctuation include the stock market crash in 1929, the Great Depression that followed in the 1930s, and World War II, which occurred from 1939 - 1945.

The graph below provides a visual of the value that one dollar held in today’s currency, as it fluctuated over the entire study period.



The 2020 Value of a Single Dollar Over the Period of 1920 - 1950

Major Themes

Roads & Bridges

The Secondary System of State Highways was created upon the passage of legislation by the Virginia General Assembly in 1932. As previously mentioned, the Great Depression resulted in serious financial pressures that prompted the state to take over county roads through the Byrd Road Act.⁶ Therefore, the newly created Virginia Department of Transportation was designated to manage and maintain the new highway system.

⁶ G. Kamptner, *The Albemarle County Land Use Law Handbook: “Getting Roads Accepted into the Secondary System of State Highways,”* Getting Roads Accepted into the Secondary System of State Highways - Info | Virginia Department of Transportation, 2012, <https://www.virginiadot.org/info/faq-2ndaryroads.asp>.

The process of adding existing roads which were not maintained by the state to the Secondary System of Highways began with the local Board of Supervisors. The Board appointed viewers to examine petitions and to file a report of their recommendations. Also, the Board could petition the State Highway Commission to surface treat a route in the Secondary System. The Secondary Highway System consists of all of the public roads, causeways, bridges, landings, and wharves in the counties of the Commonwealth that are not included in the state system of primary highways.⁷ It is important to note here that the Commonwealth also had control over the construction and maintenance of roads in the primary highway system, which included arterial highways.⁸

Requests and orders of these categories of infrastructural maintenance were reported in the Board of Supervisors' minutes, beginning with the first recorded mention of the Secondary System in 1933. The Board also often requested to move roads from the Secondary to the Primary system. In 1939, for instance, State Rt. 20, leading from Dilwyn to Scottsville, was petitioned to be extended to Charlottesville by way of Ash Lawn and Monticello, and the Board recommended that this section be put into the Primary System of Highways. In 1947, an instance of road transfer from one system to another occurred when the Board recommended that Routes 613 & 642 be transferred from the Secondary System to the Primary System. On the other hand, many roads were asked to be transferred from the primary to the secondary system – which included, among other routes, Route 20 from Route 642 near Simeon to Route 6 northwest of Scottsville.

Additionally, the Board of Supervisors also considered citizen requests for the addition of roads into the Secondary System or for road maintenance. For instance, in 1949, Mr. Guy Via and several other citizens appeared before the Board of Supervisors to request that the Road from Ehart's Mill to Free Union be hard-surfaced. In such cases, the Board of Supervisors took time to research such requests, often interviewing those impacted by such roads as well as appointing viewers to verify road necessity and conditions.

Several roads were discontinued and closed following the appointment of viewers to assess the convenience or inconvenience of discontinuing the proposed roads. These included Old Rodes Road, Old Stony Road, and portions of Old County and Old Warren Roads, among others. Before closing the roads, a notice would be posted both on the front door of the Court House of Albemarle, as well as at two public places along the road proposed to be closed for at least 20 days prior to discontinuing the road. Lastly, several instances of objections to road closures were recorded. Just one of the many instances of this occurred in 1930, when the Board rejected a petition by Columbia Beddow to close the road from Prize Hill Church to the point where it enters the new road at the fork westward of Prize Hill and a portion of the old Charlottesville-Stony Point Road.

Another, more infrequent concern of the Board raised in meeting minutes over the period was the construction and maintenance of County bridges. Often, these bridges would provide critical linkages between county roadways and thoroughfares, allowing for the passage of goods and services. One such

⁷ Virginia Code § 33.2-324.

⁸ Virginia Code § 33.2-310.

request was for two small bridges on the road from Crozet to the foot of the Blue Ridge in order that orchard owners would be able to transport their fruit to market without delay by high water. Requests such as these were taken seriously by the Board and assisted the county and its residents to grow.

Within the documentation of roads and bridges, the issues of relocating roads, making decisions and allocations for road maintenance, and determining just compensation for the takings of rights-of-way through property owners' land were also frequently included.

Road relocations were included throughout the three decades of Board meeting minutes studied and tended to include discussion of the roads' current locations, proposed changes, and reasons for the relocation. These reasons typically involved increasing the number of people the roads would serve or allowing for a connection to new roads being constructed to provide increased interconnection within the County's road network. In some cases, Board consideration of road relocations included the rejection of proposed relocations by the residents themselves, as occurred on June 13, 1923, when, by a motion of J.M. Fray, the Board unanimously adopted a resolution backed by a "majority of the citizens" who desired that Stony Point Road at Priddy's Hill consist of a straight road over the hill instead of a relocation. The direct route was approved with an 8% grade and construction was priced at \$1.10 per cubic yard.

Road maintenance determinations were also frequent within the study period. The most common road maintenance issues included grading or surfacing with crushed rock from the quarry, if funds were not sufficient for grading, as was resolved for three-tenths of a mile of road in the White Hall District in the November 21, 1923 meeting minutes. Additional maintenance and improvements in the 1920s included sand-clay resurfacing. In the 1930s, the main maintenance theme consisted of petitions to have the State Highway Commission surface existing roads. General improvements of roads, bridges, and intersections also took place throughout the three decades of study. In the late 1930s and 1940s, the State Highway Commission was often requested to treat specific roads with asphalt surface or crushed stone. Often, when roads were built, closed, relocated, or improved, the issue of how such actions would affect the underlying property owners was discussed and analyzed through viewers' reports and discussion at the Board meetings. In most cases, a determination of whether compensation was necessary, and if so, how much would be considered just compensation in order to avoid the issue of a takings, was documented in the meeting minutes. For example, in the December 17, 1930 meeting minutes, it is mentioned that an easement was granted on the lands of J.S. Carpenter for a county road from Old County Road to State Highway 704 "with receipt of \$140 cash." In some instances, just compensation was provided through a variety of methods: in the March 21, 1923 minutes, it was determined that the County would pay for routing Monticello Road through Dr. Smith's property by paying for the construction of a new hog fence on the property. In other cases just compensation was provided in cash. Additionally, in cases in which the new infrastructure would impact multiple different property owners, their respective amounts of compensation tended differ, based on how the roads were determined to affect the respective properties; often, if the land was farmland or deemed productive, the compensation was considerably higher than if the land was not being used for active agricultural production.

Water, Sewer, and Fire Protection

Virginia Code § 21-113 allows for the creation of sanitary districts, provided that enough citizens petition for the sanitary district, and that the County approves the petition. In proposed districts with under 100 qualified voters, at least fifty percent of the voters must petition. In districts with more than 100 voters, only fifty qualified voters were necessary for a petition.

In 1935, the Judge of the Circuit Court of Albemarle County ordered the establishment of a Sanitary District at Fry's Spring. By 1938, the Board of Supervisors then petitioned the Judge of the Circuit Court for a citizen vote on whether to pursue federal grant funding to construct said sewer system and disposal plant in the Fry's Spring Sanitary District. Additionally in 1935, the citizens of Woolen Mills petitioned for their own sanitary district. As the petition was received from the citizens of Woolen Mills, the Board of Supervisors then applied for grant funds from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works in order to fund a sewer system in this district. The following year, the Board motioned to apply proceeds from bond sales to finance the construction of a sewer system in Woolen Mills. Finally in 1939, the Board resolved to call \$800 of Woolen Mills Sanitary District Bonds for payment by November of that year.

In 1942, the Crozet Sanitary District was created to obtain water for domestic and industrial uses, as well as fire protection.⁹ To expand the water supply, Mr. P.G. Ligon offered to sell his Crozet Water Works to the County in 1946. After a series of surveys and reports, Mr. Ligon attempted to withdraw his offer to sell the Water Works, to which the Board of Supervisors politely informed him that they could not concede his right to withdraw at that time. Later that year, the Board signed a contract for improvements to the water system. To fund the project, the Board contracted a loan for up to \$250,000. In November, the citizens voted in favor of issuing bonds for the loan. In December, the Board authorized \$150,000 in "Water Supply Bonds." In 1947, the Board authorized an extension to facilitate petitioners applying for water service along State Highway No. 240.

Another notable action of the Board concerning water infrastructure was the decision to cooperate with Scottsville to secure an additional supply of water for the industrial plant and community cannery which was being built to aid in the war effort which was to be located on the border between Albemarle and Scottsville.

Schools

While the School Board was responsible for most decisions regarding public education, the Board of Supervisors authorized land purchases and bond issuances for construction, furnishing, and maintenance of schools. In 1949, a school referred to in the Board of Supervisors' minutes as the Joint Negro High School was planned for both Albemarle and Charlottesville. The school would consolidate Jefferson High School, Esmont High School and Albemarle Training Schools for black students in both Albemarle County and Charlottesville. Seventeen acres on Rose Hill Drive were purchased for the school from

⁹ Phil James, "Powell's Creek: Crozet History from Top to Toe," In *The Crozet Gazette*, 2017, <https://www.crozetgazette.com/2017/03/03/powells-creek-crozet-history-from-top-to-toe/>.

Jackson P. Burley, a prominent teacher, church worker, and leader in the community. According to the Board of Supervisors' records, a committee was appointed in January of 1949 to estimate the costs for the high school. By August, drawings and specifications for the high school were completed and \$600,000 in bonds were issued for its construction and furnishing, half of which would be borne by the county. It opened in 1952, serving 542 students.

That same year, discussion also began for the construction of a consolidated white high school for Albemarle County, which would open in 1953 as Albemarle High School. The school consolidated several small white high schools throughout Albemarle, except Scottsville High School. The school cost more than \$1,700,000—nearly three times more than the Burley School, enrolling 900 students at the time of its opening. The Board of Supervisors minutes reflect disagreement over the location of the white high school, but broad support for its construction. The school would not be integrated until 1963, nine years after *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated desegregation.

Competing Priorities

In addition to the typical allocations and decisions regarding infrastructure documented in the Board of Supervisors meeting minutes, some instances arose in which different types of infrastructure were proposed over the same site within the county. In these cases, prioritization determinations had to be made regarding the differing requests so as to order which improvements would take place when. For example, in one of the few inclusions of race as a descriptor in the infrastructure minutes, the December 15, 1948 meeting minutes describe a sidewalk project in Crozet in which a delegation for the Crozet Lions Club appeared “concerning a proposed sidewalk along the north side of Route 240 through the colored section.” The citizens of Crozet had made a previous request to the Board for the sidewalk to be constructed, but the previous request had been denied on the grounds that there was water line work being done that could interfere with the sidewalk construction. However, this decision was reversed on December 15, 1948, as the Board “hereby endorse[d] the sidewalk” with the justification that the Department of Highways had set aside funds for it, without commenting on whether the water line work was still a factor.

Individual Narratives

While collecting and cataloging this archival data, it was difficult to ignore the many written histories discovered within the minutes, which truly allowed for a greater understanding of the people and issues important to the County at the time through the eyes of its Board and citizenry. One such written history which played out over months of County Board minutes occurred surrounding a man named J.R. Maupin, who consistently opposed efforts for the County to improve a road that went through his property. In January of 1924, the Board of Supervisors appropriated funding to improve this road. In April of that year, several citizens applied to change or relocate that road. The Board appointed viewers to assess the implications of such a project. In May, their report was rejected and disapproved. The next month, the Board appointed a new set of viewers to assess potential impacts of the proposed road through J.R. Maupin's land. In July, the Board cited *Board of Supervisors v. Proffit*, 129 Va. 9, ordering the Attorney for the Commonwealth to move the Judge of the Circuit Court of Albemarle County to dismiss all matters

regarding the road through J.R. Maupin's land and to condemn the property. Eleven years later in 1935, J.R. Maupin appeared once again in the Board minutes. This time, the Board recommended that Road No. 601 from its intersection with Road No. 668 at J.R. Maupin's house to be improved, with no major opposition from Maupin.

Recommendations for Future Research & Analysis

Understanding the Role of Race and Place

The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors meeting minutes during the study period were mostly silent on the race of the residents and property owners petitioning the Board or being impacted by the infrastructural decisions made. However, County funding decisions concerning wages and capital expenses for teachers, staff, and facilities often varied along racial lines. It thus seems probable that actions such as recommendations for road maintenance followed a similar divide. That said, a potential next step may be to research land ownership records. For at least a portion of the study period, County tax records and assessments were recorded in annual "Land Books" which were divided by magisterial district, race, and presence within a special taxation district (such as a sanitary district or fire district). The names from the meeting minutes could be matched with the names from the Land Books to verify race and land ownership. Virginia Department of Highways maps from the study period (1932 and 1945) differentiate between White and African American schools and churches, which were often referenced in road requests. This information, as well as Census information, may provide insight into the location of rural communities during the study period and where infrastructure spending was distributed across Albemarle's expansive land area. Another question for future research may ask whether White or African American residents of Albemarle County received differing compensation for the takings of their property.

Despite not seeing too many instances of race discrepancies in the body of the minutes reviewed, we are aware through the meeting minutes that the practice of paying those of different races and genders differently was quite common. The first instance of this occurred on October 19, 1921, when both white and "colored" farm demonstrators were elected by the Board and paid vastly different yearly salaries with the "Farm Demonstrator" earning \$900/year as a salary from the Board of Supervisors and paid by the county while the "Colored Farm Demonstrator" earned just a little over a third of his counterpart with an annual salary of only \$360/year paid by the county. Even the "Home Demonstrator" as a female was paid a much more handsome salary than the "Colored Farm Demonstrator," with her salary of \$700/year, while her assistant was paid nearly half her mentor's salary at \$300/year. While these investments were not directly infrastructure-related, they did show a tendency toward financial racial disparities.

Oral Histories

Scattered among the many petitions and resolutions recorded by the Board were a few hidden gems - the names of key individuals who may still be living, or whose descendants are still Albemarle residents, who may be willing and able to provide further personal insight into Board decision-making over the study period via an oral history of sorts. One such notable figure who may be able to provide a personal

historical account is Henry Chiles, a prominent member of Albemarle County Board of Supervisors during the latter half of the study period who was very involved in many of the tasks recorded at the time. Mr. Chiles served countless times as an appointed viewer, spearheaded the passage of numerous resolutions over his tenure, and volunteered to take on many leadership roles within the Board each year. The Chiles family is famously known for their illustrious farming practices in the County, including Chiles family Orchard and Carter's Mountain Orchard. As such, either he or his immediate descendants would likely be more than able to provide valuable information which would aid in further research.

Final Thoughts, and Some Additional Noteworthy Highlights

The sheer volume of historical information recounted by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisor meeting minutes allowed for an incredible understanding of decision-making context, as well as a complete detailing of the important issues at the time. Often, spending decisions unrelated to infrastructural investments and thus left uncataloged as a part of this research endeavor aided in contextualizing the period, and in gleaning a great amount about personalities, common dilemmas, and conflicts which occurred in the County throughout the early 20th century. From the numerous instances of sheep killed by dogs with rabies in the County over the time period, including, in one case, two men who both attempted to claim payment for the loss of the exact same sheep, to the motions concerning the murderers or murderesses who ran rampant throughout the County, to the rat-killing campaigns which cost upwards of \$370 dollars in today's currency, to the convict labor camps which were established as the workforce for many of the roads and highways cataloged, to the establishment of the University of Virginia's very own Thomas Jefferson's birthday as a County holiday, it was quite amusing and incredibly insightful to learn about the histories of Albemarle through the pages upon pages of typewriter-style documents so luckily well-preserved from a century ago.

External Resources

Crozet Gazette. “Paul H. Cale and the Desegregation of Albemarle County Public Schools | Crozet Gazette.” <https://www.crozetgazette.com/2019/07/05/paul-h-cale-and-the-desegregation-of-albemarle-county-public-schools/>.

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