

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Avoid buying, selling, or trading in Tennessee public records
- Identify public records you think may be lost or stolen and report them to TSLA
- Share this pamphlet with others, including historical societies, museums, libraries, and archives
- Check catalogues, online auctions, and advertisements for public records, and report questionable offerings to TSLA



*The Tennessee State Library and Archives:
“Preserving the Past for the Future”*

CONTACT US:

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RECOVERING LOST OR STOLEN PUBLIC RECORDS



Possession or sale of any government record by private individuals is prohibited in Tennessee according to TCA §39-16-504, Tennessee’s Replevin law

LEARN THE FACTS ABOUT PUBLIC RECORDS

What are public records?

Tennessee's public records are created by state and local governments while conducting the business of the people of Tennessee. They document the work of public agencies and represent the evidence by which citizens may understand the consequences of decisions made by their government. To that end, these documents must always remain available for public inspection.

How can TSLA help if I find lost or stolen public records?

Contact us if you have knowledge of the whereabouts of misplaced public records, or if you would like to report lost or stolen public records. We also advise callers to contact their county attorney, county sheriff, or county archivist, depending on the unique circumstances of each county.



What is the law?

Possession and sale by private individuals of any government record is prohibited in Tennessee according to **TCA §39-16-504**. Called the Replevin law, it prohibits the unauthorized removal of records from governmental agencies in the state. At no time can public records legally be owned, traded, sold or bought by members of the public. Law enforcement authorities can reclaim these documents without any compensation to the would-be private owner.

Why are public records stolen?

Sometimes, collectors like to obtain records relating to, for example, Civil War or African-American history. In other cases, well-meaning citizens have "saved" their county records from destruction or neglect years ago. County archives did not always exist, so the records were stored in private hands. Now, most counties have a safe place to store county records, and the items need to be returned to their proper location— a county courthouse, county archive, or other county or state governmental office.

How can I identify public records?

- Look for official state or county letterheads at the top of the document
- Look for the county name and office written on top of the document
- Look for state or county officials as the author, sender, or recipient
- Look for official government stamps or insignias and other evidence of official state or county business

For additional information, visit our website at:

<http://state.tn.us/tsla/aps/replevin.htm>

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