Indexing historical documents is different than transcribing them. While transcription requires us to enter every word on the page, indexing captures only select information. When indexing, we record types of information that are present across multiple documents, which allows us to compare them to each other and enable analysis of entire collections or subcollections.

Indexing can be done by using either form-like fields or a spreadsheet to capture the information. You will find both formats for indexing in our crowdsourcing collections on From the Page (fromthepage.com/lva). The spreadsheet format includes many of the functions of an Excel spreadsheet; you can copy & paste, insert rows & columns, or drag-to-fill data from one cell down to other cells. We recommend that you change the layout view to have the historical document appear on the top of the browser window so that the spreadsheet will be displayed at the bottom. If the indexing is done using fields, you can view the document on the left- or right-hand side of the screen according to your preference.

When indexing, some fields will use a controlled vocabulary or format rather than the verbatim version from the text. A controlled vocabulary is a carefully selected list of specific words or phrases used to provide consistency in indexing or description. Fields with a controlled vocabulary will be shown as a drop-down list, which requires volunteers to select from a list of available options. Always select the best fit and most specific option available. If none of the options apply, look for an "other" or "none" option in the drop-down list. If the information is not given in the original document, leave this field blank by not making a selection. An example of a controlled format is using YYYY-MM-DD for the date, though it likely will have been written differently in the original document. Names may also use a controlled format (last, first) or you can separate names into first, middle, last fields. Use your best judgement to index information from the original documents into controlled fields.

In some ways, indexing can be more difficult than transcribing historical documents verbatim. It requires us to make more decisions about the information rather than just entering everything. However, indexing can also be an incredibly powerful tool to help unlock and understand the contents of historical documents. Questions or concerns can be left in the "Notes and Questions" area on From the Page or emailed to our team.

The instructions for indexing have some important differences from other Library of Virginia crowdsourcing projects. Please follow the instructions below.

Indexing instructions:

- If a field is left blank or the information is not provided in the original document, leave it blank in your index.

- When selecting from a drop-down list for a controlled field, be as specific as possible in your selection.

- Enter dates in the format provided, usually YYYY-MM-DD. If a precise date is not given, enter only the known information, such as 1834-04 for April 1834.

- For fields that are not controlled, enter the information according to the collection-specific instructions found on the Help tab. Options include summarizing the information or entering it as it is written.

- Do not supply or infer additional information. Include only what is provided from the text.

- Use a numeric value for age. For example, if "about seventeen" is written, enter the number 17. If a child's age is written in months, write the decimal conversion. For example, "9 months" would be entered as .75.

- For height, fractions should be converted to decimal points. Round to the nearest quarter inch.

- When the word "ditto" or "d.o." appears, write out the information to which the ditto is referring from previous lines. Ditto is sometimes represented as a double apostrophe mark; please enter the information above. Remember, our goal is to create searchable data with all the information present in the original documents.

- Type [illegible] for any words you cannot read.

- Save often!

Thank you for joining us in Making History!

Contact us with any questions at makinghistory@virginiamemory.com.