



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Stolen Texas Supreme Court Records Cache Recovered by Texas State Library and Archives Commission

AUSTIN, Texas – The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) recently recovered 85 Texas Supreme Court case files that have been missing since the early 1970s.

In 1972, a Texas Supreme Court janitor removed more than 1,000 case files dating from the 1840s through the 1860s (many pertaining to slave-related cases) from the Supreme Court offices. Today, historical records of the Supreme Court are maintained at the Texas State Library and Archives in secure storage, with access limited to select staff and where public use is closely monitored. As part of ongoing recovery efforts of stolen state records, Archives staff monitor major Texana auction sites and eBay. When stolen documents are identified, TSLAC and the Attorney General's Office work with dealers to return these documents to the state.

After recognizing missing case files on an auction website in November 2011, State Archivist Jelain Chubb notified the Attorney General's Office and requested assistance invoking Section 441.192 of the Government Code, which code gives TSLAC the right to recover illegally removed records, even if subsequent buyers or sellers do not know the documents are stolen. These 59 files were proven to be property of the State of Texas and were surrendered to TSLAC on November 14, 2011. Later in the month, three dealers voluntarily returned an additional 26 cases, for a total of 85 recovered cases.

"I commend the dealers who returned these missing cases and the State Archives staff who so diligently and zealously pursued them," said Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson. "These cases were not just stolen from the Court. They were stolen from the people of Texas and, through the Archives efforts, replace once-lost history for all."

One example of a returned court document is a two-page filing of *Mitchell & Mitchell v. Wright*, 4 Tex. 283 (1849) that generated at least a half-dozen Texas Supreme Court rulings. An important example of the first post-statehood Supreme Court stance on women's issues, the court found in favor of Mrs. Margaret Wright, who was trying to obtain a divorce and settle her son's estate. Incidentally, Sam Houston named this same Margaret Wright the "mother of Texas" because of her demonstrated courage during the Texas Revolution by smuggling food, medicine, and a gun to several men who had escaped the Goliad massacre.

"We appreciate the assistance of the Attorney General to help bring these important Supreme Court cases back to their rightful home," said Peggy D. Rudd, director and librarian. "These legal documents are important pieces of Texas history, and, as such, belong to the people of Texas."

More information can be found, and suspect documents reported, on the TSLAC website: <https://tslac.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/missingintro.html> or by calling (512) 463-5500.

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PHOTOS ATTACHED.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Photo Caption: These Supreme Court files were recovered in November 2011, as part of a continued TSLAC effort to recover missing records that belong to the people of Texas.

ABOUT THE TEXAS STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES COMMISSION

Formed in 1909, TSLAC is committed to giving Texans access to information and programs they can use to improve their lives and communities. We provide historical and genealogical search assistance, federal and state government documents, electronic research and library services to all Texans, including those who are unable to read standard print material because of physical or reading disabilities. For more information, visit www.tsl.state.tx.us

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