



**WAKE COUNTY
RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE
COVENANTS
VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

October 2023

CONTACTS

Wake County Register of Deeds

- **Location**
- 300 S. Salisbury Street, Suite 1700
Raleigh, NC 27601
 - Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

- **Contact Information**
 - Phone: (919) 856-5460
 - Fax: (919) 856-5467

 - Email:

 - Website: WakeGov.com/deeds

- Tammy Brunner, Wake County Register of Deeds
Tammy.Brunner@wake.gov

- Roxanne Buzzille, Project Coordinator
Roxanne.Buzille@wake.gov

- Lisa Bocchetti, Volunteer Coordinator
wakecovenantsproject@gmail.com

What are Racially Restrictive Covenants?

Racially Restrictive Covenants were clauses inserted into property deeds in the early 20th century to prohibit the sale or occupation of property to non-white persons. Although they were ruled unenforceable by the US Supreme Court ruling *Shelley v. Kramer* in 1948, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing, these covenants remain on the books in many communities and states in the US.

Why are they important?

Understanding the ways in which these covenants influenced the ability to own property and accumulate wealth in our communities can shed light on current issues surrounding access to housing.

Further information:

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States, 2nd Edition*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018.

Santucci, Larry. "Documenting Racially Restrictive Covenants in 20th Century Philadelphia." *Huduser.gov*, 2020.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscpe/vol22num3/ch11.pdf>.

Opportunities for Volunteers

Volunteers can contribute to this project by completing tasks that can be done by anyone with a computer and an internet connection. The two main tasks at this time are locating racially restrictive covenants contained in deeds recorded in Wake County deed books, and extracting and recording important information from them (indexing) on the provided Google docs spreadsheet.

After the covenants have been located, indexed and recorded on the spreadsheets, volunteers will take the completed spreadsheets and review the information they contain for accuracy.

This process should feel very familiar to anyone who volunteered for the Wake County Enslaved Persons Project. Because of the time period during which racially restrictive covenants were used, there will probably be fewer hand-written deeds than type-written ones, but being comfortable with cursive script will be a definite asset.

Getting Started

To volunteer for this project, please send an email to the Volunteer Coordinator at

wakecovenantsproject@gmail.com. The Volunteer Coordinator will then send you a few practice exercises: copies of some of the types of covenant documents you may encounter, and a copy of the Google Docs spreadsheet to fill out. This should give you a feeling for the work required and help you decide whether or not you wish to continue with the project. Volunteers who decide to continue to work on the project should complete the practice spreadsheet, and return it to the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator will then send you a set of deeds for processing, typically one month's worth of deeds.

Thank you for being willing to contribute your time and effort to this important project!

One Last Note

The materials we will be searching can be very difficult to read on an emotional level. You may find that these covenants lead you to question beliefs or understandings of our culture's relationship to wealth accumulation and property ownership that you or people you love and respect have passed along. The research community refers to this as historical trauma, and it is very real. Please be aware that the effects of historical trauma can include feelings of sadness, anger, hopelessness, fatigue,

irritability, difficulty sleeping. If this is your experience, remember to take care of yourself. You may find it helpful to take breaks, talk to friends, family, spiritual advisors or other volunteers about the work you are doing. You may also find that supporting a project like this with your hard work can lead to a new understanding of our past and help find paths toward a better future together. It is an honor to be collaborating on this project with you.