
From the Editor's Desk

Description

Leaving the Publication Better Than We Found It

Article by John Mashack

When I accepted the role of Examiner Committee Chair and Editor in Chief of *The VLTA Examiner Magazine* in 2023, I inherited responsibility for a publication with a long history and an important role within the Association. For decades, *The Examiner* has served as a voice for Virginia's title industry, a source of education, a record of Association history, and a reflection of the people who make VLTA what it is. My goal was never to reinvent the publication. I simply wanted to build on what previous editors, contributors, and volunteers had already established.

Over the past three years, our committee has worked to strengthen the publication by focusing on original content, expanding contributor relationships, introducing new features, reviving a few old ones, and making sure *The Examiner* remained relevant to title professionals across the Commonwealth.

Along the way, we welcomed new authors, brought back *The Claims Corner*, continued features such as *The Unknown Title Examiner (TUTE)*, launched initiatives including *Conversations with Clerks*, *The Hidden Recorded Treasure*, and the VLTA Book Club, and began the multi-year *Life, Liberty and Property* series exploring the relationship between property rights, land ownership, and America's 250th anniversary. Together, these efforts helped broaden the publication's content while keeping its focus on the title industry and the people who work in it.

One lesson I have learned is that publications succeed because of relationships. Every issue represents the efforts of volunteer authors, committee members, industry partners, VLTA staff, and readers willing to share their knowledge and experience. The articles that appear in *The Examiner* usually begin with a conversation, an introduction, or an idea shared by someone willing to contribute. No editor creates a publication alone.

As I prepare to conclude my tenure as Chair and Editor, I find myself thinking less about individual articles and more about the people behind them. Over time, I have come to appreciate the importance of relationships, traditions, and institutional knowledge. Every Chair inherits a publication shaped by those who came before and eventually passes it on to someone else. Our responsibility is not simply to produce the next issue, but to leave the publication in good shape for the people who follow us.

I think there are still plenty of opportunities to expand member engagement. Features such as *Members in Motion*, *Board Member Spotlight*, *Conversations with Clerks*, the VLTA Book Club, the multi-year *Life, Liberty and Property* series, and future storytelling initiatives can all help strengthen connections throughout our industry and give more members a reason to engage with the publication.

Before I wrap up, I want to thank the people who helped make the last three years successful. Leigh Hubbard and Emily Stephens provided continuity, support, and institutional knowledge. Anne Tourangeau taught me a great deal when I served as her Vice-Chair before succeeding her as Chair. Julie-Ann Rutledge brought creativity, enthusiasm, and more new ideas than I can count. And, of course, none of this would have been possible without the many authors, contributors, and committee members who generously shared their time and expertise. Most importantly, thank you to our readers. Without your continued support and engagement, there would be no publication.

I am also looking forward to seeing the publication's next chapter under the leadership of Laura Wakefield. I am confident she will continue building on the strong foundation already in place while bringing her own ideas and perspective to the role.

As I transition from Editor to my next chapter of service within VLTA, my hope is simple: that each future Chair leaves the publication a little stronger than they found it. If that happens, *The Examiner* will continue to thrive for many years to come.

After all, we are not owners of this publication. We are merely its stewards.

And stewardship, at its core, is about leaving something a little better for the next person than it was when you found it.



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