

Panola County Clerk Records Archive Preservation and Restoration Plan 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to outline the preservation and restoration of the County Clerk's records archive for the upcoming fiscal year. Our goal is to digitally image all records stored in the County Clerk's office in a standardized, universal format, while simultaneously restoring and preserving the original records. This process will provide access, minimize deterioration of existing records and assist in developing the County Clerk's disaster recovery capabilities. Funding is necessary and legislation has been enacted to provide the collection of fees for this purpose.

The **County Clerk Records Archive Fee**, LGC 118.011(f)(1) and LGC 118.025, provides for "...the preservation and restoration services performed by the county clerk in connection with maintaining a county clerk's records archive" and authorizes the collection of up to \$10 per recorded document, with Commissioners' Court approval. The Panola County Clerk's Office currently collects \$10 per recorded document. The funds generated from the collection of the Archive Fee may be expended only for the preservation and restoration, including automation, of the County Clerk's records archive.

The **County Clerk Records Management and Preservation Fee** provides for "...records management and preservation services performed by the county clerk after the filing and recording of a document in the records of the office of the clerk" and authorizes the collection of up to \$10 per recorded (non-court-related) document [LGC 118.011(b)(2) and LGC 118.0216].

Additionally, LGC 134.102(a) provides for the collection of a \$25.00 **County Records Management and Preservation Fee (RMPF)** per conviction in a criminal misdemeanor case filed in the County Clerk's Office, and recent legislation re-configured filing fees for all civil cases, authorizing the collection of a \$30.00 **RMPF** for new civil cases [LGC 135.101(b)](an increase of \$20.00), and a \$20.00 **RMPF** for subsequent filings. New probate and guardianship cases include a \$15.00 **RMPF** [LGC 135.102(b)](an increase of \$5.00), and \$5.00 **RMPF** for subsequent filings. Per LGC 134.155 and 135.154, these fees "...may be used by a county only to fund records management and preservation services, including automation, performed by the court clerk on approval by the commissioners court..."

In FY 2020 and FY 2021, collection of these fees in the County Clerk's office generated approximately \$180,163 and \$169,857, respectively. During the first half of 2022, these fees have generated almost \$95,000.

Designation of Records

Open/Public Records

Panola County real property records range in date from approximately 1850 to present, and contain over 2,100 books of recorded documents and indexes. All original land record books and index books have been microfilmed or scanned and reproduced in book format. With approval and support of Commissioners' Court in recent years, most land records have now been digitized and are available both

locally and online. However, the majority of the original land record books have not been restored/preserved, and as current digitization projects are completed by staff, we would like to begin the restoration/preservation of those books.

Probate, mental health, civil and criminal cases also date from approximately 1850 to present. Probate, civil and criminal case records (with the exception of juvenile criminal cases) are open to the public. With the advent of mandatory e-filing and our determination to be paperless, we are creating very few new paper case files. With the support of Commissioners' Court, we now have digitized and preserved the oldest probate case files. County Clerk staff are working in-house to complete the digitization of the latest probate case files, and will continue to convert older paper civil case files to digital files to conserve space and enable the public to access those open records electronically. Approximately half of the Probate and Final Estate Minute Books dating back to sovereignty were preserved in 2022 and are now stored in the courthouse. The remaining Probate and Final Estate Minute Books that are in poor condition are scheduled to be preserved in early 2023.

Commissioners' Court Minutes are currently created and recorded electronically, and have been scanned and indexed back to 1996. Our plan is to continue to digitize these records, as personnel and equipment are available and time allows. The newly purchased Commissioners' Court Minute software will allow this project to be more easily implemented.

Livestock Marks and Brands record books date to 1882. These books were sent to an outside vendor with the birth, death and marriage record books to be restored and preserved. The project was completed in late 2018, and those books are currently available in our office. Marks and Brands are indexed digitally, and Marriage records should be fully indexed and completed by County Clerk staff in the next two years.

There are a number of miscellaneous books that are frequently referenced by staff and/or the public that would benefit from being digitized, so that the original books may be preserved. Our plan is to continue the restoration and conversion of our miscellaneous books in the next few years, as personnel, equipment, time and funds are available.

Closed Records

Birth, death and marriage records date prior to 1900, and military discharge records date to early 20th century. *The original books were the only resource available until recently.* In 2017, Commissioners' Court approved funding to restore, preserve and digitize 72 of our oldest birth, death and marriage books. The preservation and restoration phase of this project was completed in late 2018, and I am pleased to say that County Clerk staff has digitally indexed and almost entirely completed the birth and death records, allowing us to quickly identify and issue records as they are requested by the public.

Summary

Significant progress has been made in recent years restoring, preserving and digitizing the records of the County Clerk. It is our desire, and I believe my duty, to preserve the history of Panola County and its citizens in the best way possible, with the most efficient use of fees collected. With continued funding and support of Commissioners' Court, we will persist until all of the records in our care have been preserved for future generations.

Notice of Public Hearing
On a Plan for the Preservation and Restoration of the
County Clerk's Records Archive



Notice is hereby given that a public hearing on a plan for the preservation and restoration of the Panola County Clerk's records archive will be held pursuant to Local Government Code 118.025(g), at a regular meeting of the Panola County Commissioners' Court, in the Commissioners' Courtroom, Panola County Courthouse, 110 South Sycamore, Carthage, Texas, on Tuesday, August 16, 2022 at 1:30 PM.

Dated this 19th day of July, 2022.



David L. Anderson
County Judge, Panola County

Attest:

Bobbie Davis
County Clerk, Panola County