

Panola County Clerk Records Archive Preservation and Restoration Plan 2024

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 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]. The Panola County Clerk's Office currently collects \$10 per recorded document. The funds generated from the collection of this fee may be used for specific records management and preservation, including automation.

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 collection of a \$30.00 **RMPF** for new civil cases [LGC 135.101(b), and a \$20.00 **RMPF** for subsequent filings. New probate and guardianship cases include a \$15.00 **RMPF** [LGC 135.102(b), 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 2021 and FY 2022, collection of these fees alone in the County Clerk's office generated approximately \$183,703 and \$186,401, respectively. During the first half of 2023, these fees have generated almost \$85,000.

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 preserved the oldest probate case files. County Clerk staff are working in-house to complete the digitization of probate cases, 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. The majority of the Probate and Final Estate Minute Books dating back to sovereignty have been preserved and digitized in recent years are now stored in the courthouse.

Commissioners' Court Minutes are currently created and recorded electronically, and paper versions 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 Commissioners' Court Minute software purchased in 2022 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 year.

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, using funds collected in the form of recording/filing fees assessed in the County Clerk's Office. The preservation and restoration phase of this project was completed in late 2018, and I am pleased to say that County Clerk staff has almost entirely completed indexing of the birth and death records, allowing us to quickly identify and issue records as they are requested by the public. Military Discharge records have been completely digitized by County Clerk staff, and an index provided to the local Veterans Administration Office.

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.

ORDER #2023-05

WHEREAS, Section 118.025 of the Local Government Code reads as follows: Sec 118.025(b) The commissioners court of a county may adopt a records archive fee under Section 118.011(f) as part of the county's annual budget. The fee must be set and itemized in the county's budget as part of the budget preparation process. The fee for "Records Archive" under Section 118.011(f) is for the preservation and restoration services performed by the county clerk in connection with maintaining a County Clerk's records archive; and

WHEREAS, the above-referenced fee shall be collected by the County Clerk at the time a person, excluding a state agency, presents a public document to the county clerk for recording or filing; and

WHEREAS, (d) of Section 118.025 of the Local Government Code reads: "The fee shall be deposited in a separate records archive account in the general fund of the county; and

WHEREAS, (g) of Section 118.025 reads: "The county clerk shall prepare an annual written plan for funding the preservation and restoration of the county clerk's records archive." ... "The commissioners court shall publish notice of a public hearing on the plan in a newspaper of general circulation in the county not later than the 15th day before the date of the hearing. After the public hearing, the plan shall be considered for approval by the commissioners' court. Funds from the records archive account may be expended only as provided by the plan. All expenditures from the records archive account shall comply with Subchapter C, Chapter 262.";

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED by the Commissioners' Court of Panola County, Texas, meeting in Open Session at a properly scheduled meeting of said Court, that the sum of **TEN AND NO/100 (\$10.00) DOLLARS** be collected by the County Clerk from each person(s) when a public document is presented to said clerk for recording or filing beginning January 1, 2024.

PASSED, APPROVED, and ADOPTED this 18th day of July, 2023.

Absent

County Judge Rodger G. McLane

Billy Alexander

Honorable Billy Alexander
Commissioner, Precinct One

Craig M. Lawless

Honorable Craig M. Lawless
Commissioner, Precinct Three

David A. Cole

Honorable David A. Cole
Commissioner, Precinct Two

Dale LaGrone

Honorable Dale LaGrone
Commissioner, Precinct Four

ATTEST:

Bobbie Davis

County Clerk Bobbie Davis

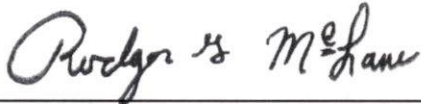


Notice of Public Hearing

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 15, 2023 at 9:00 AM.

Dated this 18th day of July 2023.



Rodger McLane
County Judge, Panola County

Attest:


Bobbie Davis
County Clerk, Panola County