

## OHRAB Final Project Report January 2012

**Institution/Organization Name:** Clark County Historical Society

**Project Title:** Probate Record Rehousing Project

**Project Director:**

Natalie Fritz

937-324-0657

nataliemfritz@aol.com

### **Summary of Project Activities and Accomplishments:**

Here at the Clark County Historical Society we are proud to *keep* our local history and sometimes feel even more proud when we *make* history ourselves, but we know that with every new donation we receive and process to keep for future generations, that history is unfolding. As we worked on this Probate Court Record Project, we could literally say that history was *unfolding*, because that's what we spent 30 weeks doing: unfolding history.

With the grant funds we received from the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board, we were finally able to tackle a large portion of the unprocessed Clark County Probate Court records that we have in our collection. We held a meeting with our volunteers from the library and archives in the middle of April to lay out the processing details, and recruit as many willing workers as we could. The desire to jump in and start processing was so strong that we decided to begin the project during the last week of April using file folders and boxes from our current supply, which we later replenished. By the end of June we applied the \$1520.00 we received in grant funds for supplies to purchase 135 boxes and 4,000 legal file folders.

The project began slowly at first as our volunteers got used to the processing steps. In the beginning, many were taken in with reading through all of the interesting details of each case, so it took a while to get through a box. Luckily it didn't take long for everyone to become old hands at processing, which allowed us to work more quickly, yet still pick up interesting and exciting details. A server crash around mid-summer helped the project along quite a bit as staff members who would

normally be tied to the computer suddenly found time to devote to the project. (Don't worry, our server recovered!)

Based on previous experience with Probate Court records, we estimated how many cases we could process before the end of the year. In our grant request we pinpointed fourteen individuals (4 staff members at 40 hours apiece and 10 volunteers) who we expected to work on the project. We didn't quite anticipate for two of our staff members, Virginia and Kasey, to be unable to devote the intended hours to the project, due to unexpected illness and other time constraints and responsibilities. However, Mel and Natalie made up the promised time, devoting at least 80 hours apiece to the project between supervising, processing, and reorganizing to create space for newly processed boxes. Another thing we didn't anticipate was getting more people than we expected to work. By the end of the project we had called into service a total of eleven volunteers, three interns and three staff members who devoted a grand total of 925 hours over 30 weeks. We averaged about 23 hours per week and had anywhere from one to six people working up to five hours per day.

From the end of April through the third week of November 2011, we estimate that we processed 100 cubic feet of records. We used all 4,000 file folders and 100 (of the 135) boxes to process cases from 1908-1923, numbered 5,480-10,100. Although these cases are numbered sequentially, some were removed from public use prior to donation to the society such as lunacy cases and adoptions and some case packets are so large that they required multiple file folders. This accounts for a discrepancy between the actual number of files used versus the number of cases. From previous experience we expected the boxes to double in size once processed. Since we were aiming to process 65 boxes, we expected to need 135 new boxes. In reality we only ended up using 100 new boxes to house the records previously stored in 65. This means we have boxes left over whenever we begin the next leg of the project, which would entail processing the remaining 9,000 cases. (Cases past #20,000 are already flattened in legal folders).

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We accomplished our main objective with this project and we made the Clark County Probate Records more accessible to researchers. By removing the original cases from the tightly packed envelopes and flattening them, we protected the cases, preserving them for future researchers, and making them easier to read and copy. Processing also made the boxes much lighter which makes it easier for volunteers and employees to pull. Obviously we hoped to meet our objectives and finish the project before the end of 2011, but we never really thought about the side effects we would encounter. We expected unfolding and removing staples to be fairly boring and warned our volunteers accordingly, but it turned out to be a fun and engaging project. In fact, when we finished our volunteers surprised us by asking expectantly when we'd start up again!

Since we don't have a designated processing area at the historical society, this project was done in our research library in full view of researchers, which led to lots of teaching moments. Our volunteers were happy to talk to visitors about what we were working on and explain to them the benefits of using probate records. Most researchers who utilize these records are conducting genealogical research, but through this process we came to realize that they carry a wider worth. They highlight our county *and* country, following the contours of history. Those that worked on the project now understand the treasures hidden in these records and we hope that the newspaper articles about the project by our local history ally, Tom Stafford, helped build a better awareness within our community. In any case, it was a wonderful project to be a part of and we are looking forward to continue helping history unfold in the future.

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**PROJECT HOURS**

**Staff**

Faith Freeman	4
Natalie Fritz	80
Mel Glover	80

**Interns**

Sandy Bialik	4
Zach Foster	6
Amber Lopez	63

**Volunteers**

Pat Baker	59
Judy Bowman	12
Marguerite Brinkman	139.5
Flossie Hulszier	191.5
Linda Moeller	12.25
Bob Morris	11
Elaine Roller	27.75
George Simon	21
Ruth Stiles	117
Bill Vatter	44.5
Virginia Warren	52.5

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>925</b>
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