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To: Greg Brush-Chief Administrator,
From: Jason Alexander, Manager-Imaging Center and Mail Center
Re: Digitization and Public Access to Land Registration Cases
Date: May 21st, 2019

Background

In 2014 the Clerk of Courts purchased two “Mekel” machines, which are machines specifically designed to take snapshots of our microfiche and convert them into digital images for viewing and for digital preservation. Until recently, both of those machines have been utilized to digitize 1987 and 1988 Common Pleas civil court cases. The decision to digitize those types of records predates my tenure as head of the Imaging Center. Over the last few years it has been observed that of all of the cases that we have on microfilm, those cases are not highly sought after.

Finding

With Hamilton County being one of Ohio’s largest counties it brings with it a voluminous amount of court records, and old court records at that. During my overseeing of the Imaging Center I have observed that there is a sporadic amount of older cases that we do in fact possess in microfilm form that are requested by the public. I realized that there had to be some type of records that were more broadly requested by the public that could be digitized with the hope that they would someday be made public through our website.

During the last few months of 2018 and the first few months of 2019 I identified an uptick in requests for “LR” or “Land Registration” Cases. Registered land has boundaries certified to be correct meaning that the title is guaranteed by a state insurance fund. A “Land Registration” case is created in the Court of Common Pleas when a dispute arises regarding property lines pertaining to a parcel of land that has been registered with the Hamilton County Recorder’s Office. Although on August 6th, 2014 the Board of Hamilton County Commissioners abolished registered land in Hamilton County, that just meant no additional land could be registered subsequent to August 6th, 2014, land that was registered prior to that date is still registered. With that being said, Hamilton County has more registered land than any other county in the State of Ohio.

Conclusion

Due to the following observations in requests for Land Registrations, I consulted with our volunteer archivist, Jim Dempsey about my idea to digitize these types of cases. He agreed completely that these records would be very useful in digital form for the title examiner community. Even though this may be a small group, these cases are of paramount importance in concerning the work that they do. The land registration cases are almost exclusively requested by title examiners in researching the most complete history that they can possibly obtain regarding a registered piece of land. I would assume the increase in requests for these cases by title examiners is due to all of the renovation and development within the city of Cincinnati in an effort to ascertain exactly how the Court of Common Pleas has ruled regarding these defining property lines that have been disputed in years prior.

In February of this year, Jim Dempsey and I devised a plan to have the "LR" cases digitized. Since February of this year, Jeff Prem, one of my Imaging Center employees has been working very diligently to process these images through one of our two Mekel machines so that they are converted into digital form. In the last few weeks, we have had requests from title examiners for some "LR" cases that we have already digitized. It was extremely convenient to be able to just email them the digital file in lieu of doing it by conventional microfilm means. After fulfilling a few of their requests by way of emailing the digital file, this office has received nothing but praise from the requestors and they have inquired as to us making these images available on our website.

In April, I had a meeting with some of our IT staff to express to them my vision in what we should do with these digital images. A subsequent meeting was had very recently in May with full support from IT that these images could in fact be placed on our website for the public to access. After just consulting once again with our IT staff, it was determined that we would transfer the digital images in a two-step process. At the end of May, I would turn over the digital images that have been processed thus far to IT for them to upload into the servers and database for testing, with the remaining "LR" digital images being tendered to IT after their completion. We estimate that at this time, completion would be approximately a month or month and a half out.