



PRELIM-201801

Access to Historical Records: Major Initiatives (Preliminary) National Archives and Records Administration

Fort Bend County District Clerk's Office Project Narrative

A. Project Overview

In today's time everyone wants to know their origin. It is not different for Fort Bend County to not only know its origin but to have an actual permanent record that reflects the time of the Independence of Texas and Fort Bend County's place in this independence. Our records are in such a state of decrepitness to the extent of crumbling and fading. It is crucial to retain the validity of the history of Fort Bend County, Texas just as for any document that reflects the history of our forefathers. In restoring, preserving and digitizing these historical records they will be made available for viewing to the public.

This project addresses the historical records previously held by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC). The records were surrendered to the TSLAC in 1990 by a previous District Clerk. Upon the election of Fort Bend County District Clerk, Annie Rebecca Elliott, it was her goal to have the records returned for preservation and restoration in order to protect the history of Fort Bend County. After numerous attempts over the past 10 years, TSLAC agreed to return custody of all Fort Bend County District Clerk records in the Regional Historical Resource Depository (RHRD) program collection at the George Memorial Library in Richmond, Texas. Her goal was achieved and the records were retrieved on December 8, 2017. Records retrieved included historical Pre-1950 case files (in 150 boxes) and approximately 70 historical volumes of index books with an estimated page count of 286,183 pages.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Code, Chapter 205, Section 205.002: Any local government record data may be stored electronically in addition to or instead of source documents in paper or other media, subject to the requirements of this chapter and rules adopted under this chapter, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission's Local Schedule DC establishes mandatory minimum retention periods for records that are associated with the office of the District Clerk. In accordance and compliance with said Schedule, the retention period for Case Papers dated 1950 or earlier is Permanent. **RETENTION NOTES:** (c) HISTORIC COURT RECORDS RETENTION REQUIREMENTS - Notwithstanding the retention periods set down in this schedule, the following records must be retained **PERMANENTLY**: 1) all case papers dated 1950 or earlier and trial dockets containing entries dated 1950 or earlier...

B. Cost of the Project

Record Series: Civil Case File	\$1,261,184.88
Criminal Case File	\$ 287,729.20
Tax Suit	\$ 91,146.24
Various Volumes	<u>\$ 143,927.50</u>
Project Total	\$1,783,987.82

C. Description of the Project

If selected, the Grant will support the preservation, long-term management and digital access of this collection. The Fort Bend County District Clerk's Office will partner with Kofile Technologies, Inc. (Kofile) who will address all of the necessary services for these assets. This includes preservation, restoration and archival digitization for all records which includes image capture, processing, and enhancements for the Fort Bend County District Clerk's Office case management system.

Kofile's proprietary indexing software and keying procedures provides proven 99.25% accuracy. This will improve document retrieval and build a dependable, searchable database for Fort Bend County District Clerk's office and customers.

Records stewards are faced with an insurmountable task-the responsibility to endure the physical protection of collections and to maintain access to critical data. Even if the records are fragile, extremely brittle, and lack microfilm (analog) security copies, access is often necessary.

Many factors threaten the permanence of historical assets. Records are composed of organic materials, such as paper, cloth, leather, paste, and glue. These components are hygroscopic (readily absorbing and retaining moisture). Unmonitored environmental conditions will compromise the life span of a permanent and/or historical records.

Preservation insures the survival of source originals for the application of future technologies. Kofile is the only developer and manufacturer of the Lay-Flat Archival Polyester Pocket and Disaster Safe County Binder. Preservation includes conservation treatments, surface cleaning, flattening, deacidification, and mending. Sheets are encapsulated and bound into Disaster Safe Binders.

Deacidification – The addition of a finely divided alkaline material to paper fibers. The addition of an alkaline buffer is approved for use on papers that would otherwise deteriorate because of their tendency to produce acid, or for acidic papers that cannot be washed.

What does this mean to our office? If the paper does not have acid-free components, the chemicals deteriorating within the paper fibers and materials cause deterioration of bindings and pages. Over time, these papers become increasingly acidic. This breakdown is evident in yellowing or browning paper. In addition, the paper becomes brittle and loses its resistance to folds. Deacidification will halt this process.

Most are familiar with the experience of handling of an old book – the binding is worn; the pages are brittle and yellowed; and it emits a slight odor. As the years pass, handling grows more difficult and the book visibly ages. The aging can be halted through conservation. While a fraction of damage to the books is due to handling, the major culprit is the acid in the paper fibers. This is accomplished through deacidification. Records also deteriorate as a result of handling, which damages

bindings and pages; acidic inks such as iron gall ink, which “eats through” paper; and improper storage methods, which threaten the structural integrity of the volumes. Another factor is the introduction of bleaching agents or acidic-sizing agents into the wood pulp paper-making process as a way to brighten paper. Now, years and decades later, acidic, dull yellows replace the bright white. These properties encase the assets in an acidic time bomb.

D. Areas of Concern

Many factors threaten the permanence of these assets. Any deterioration is the result of natural aging, a history of use, lack of environmental controls, and UV light exposure. Other possible areas of concern for archival local government records collections are documented following:

History of Use/Mechanical Damage - Everyday use greatly affects collections. Sheets bear signs of grime and the natural oils of human hands. Exposure leaves sheets susceptible to damage and loss even with careful use. Many sheets suffer from mechanical damage and are dirty, brittle, and torn. Index Books sustain the most use. Thus, they suffer greater risks of text loss and sheet deterioration. Paper strength is completely depleted from continuous use. Eventually, tabs and sheet fragments are lost. Immediate attention is often required.

Acidic Paper - In the past, papermaking processes utilized bleach to whiten sheets. In time, this paper becomes acidic—evident by brittle and discolored paper (yellowing or browning). Paper also brittles when relative humidity (RH) drops too low or fluctuates. **Acidic Ink** - Acidic inks can “eat” or “burn” through a sheet. Unmonitored temperature and relative humidity (RH) accelerate this process. Inks also fade with exposure to UV light. Historically, clerks used iron gall inks. These inks contain sulfuric acid, which fades with time. With proper treatments, chemical breakdowns (e.g., acid hydrolysis) are remedied.

Improper Storage Methods: Tri-Folding - Anyone stepping into a courthouse can see the effects of antiquated filing and storage methods. Pigeon files or shuck cabinets (colloquial names) required records to be tri-folded. This storage method was judged destructive over 75 years ago. Pigeon file drawers or “cans” pull out for access to the housed instruments. This sliding function shreds fragile documents, while the tri-folded state weakens paper strength. **Broken Book Block** -Once a binding fails, damage escalates. Sheets are free to drift from the protection of the book block. With exposure, fragments become abused and susceptible to loss.

Non-Archival Materials - The off gasses of deteriorating metals contribute to paper’s chemical breakdown. Major culprits include the metal content of book spines, the surrounding physical environment, and non-archival fasteners (e.g., binder clips, paper clips, and staples). Off gasses eventually destroy the volume’s structural integrity. Another symptom of metal oxidation is *foxing* (foxlike, reddish and brown stains or blotches on the paper).

Slumping (Leaning) Books - The average weight of a record book is 24 pounds. The pressure of leaning books causes permanent damage to bindings. This is known as slumping. Eventually, a damaged spine results in a broken book block and loosening of individual sheets.

Tape Strips (also known as Sheet Extenders) - Appearing innocent, these are an inappropriate “quick fix” to a prevailing problem. To save collections, the underlying issues causing the deterioration of the sheets’ margins require correction. The acidic content of the sheet extenders only adds to the paper’s chemical breakdown. The acid used in the non-archival adhesive migrates into the paper’s fibers, causing stains. Instead of solving the original binding problem, this chemical breakdown causes the paper’s natural fibers to fatigue and deteriorate. Removal is a long and arduous process. Each is carefully lifted from the page.

Tape & Non-Archival Adhesives - The Library of Congress warns “pressure sensitive tapes, such as scotch, masking, ‘invisible,’ quick-release, cellophane, and even so-called ‘archival’ tapes” are all culprits. All tapes and adhesives of these types will stain the paper and may cause inks and colors to ‘bleed.’

Mold & Mildew - In an archives, mold and mildew often emerge following flood, fire, the presence of micro-organics, or proximity to toxic substances (asbestos or bacteria). Mold will have a visible presence on the binder or page’s surface. It is often visible emerging from the spine’s binding and creeping down a page’s margin. Mold is considered active if the growth is damp and smears. Inactive mold is dry and powdery. Items with active mold are bagged and sealed on-site before transport so that the spores do not spread. Items with active toxins require ozone treatment in an isolation booth. Without isolation, the mold spores could enter the HVAC and infect a facility. This treatment kills the mold spores—meaning they will not grow or re-germinate. Inactive mold is still an allergen and requires removal.

Water Damage - Humidity and water are the most destructive threats. After exposure to water, pages adhere to one another when compressed. Separation without loss of text and water soluble inks (such as ink signatures) is vital. Water damaged records are extremely fragile.

Temperature & Humidity Monitoring - Even slight changes in temperature can double paper’s natural aging rate. In reality, temperature and Relative Humidity (RH) are not consistent in a courthouse (especially on weekends). Regulate temperature to 68°F ± 5°F—even in the winter. Temperature fluctuation promotes mold. If uncomfortable, forewarn staff and patrons to wear adequate clothing.

Guillotining - Always question vendors if they recommend power cutters to dismantle sewn books. Kofile never attempts any procedure potentially resulting in a loss of text or weakening of document integrity.

Fading Photostats - Negative Photostats record irreplaceable information. However, time and public use deteriorate the emulsion (*sulfiding*). The deterioration is also evidenced by the fading or yellowing of the sheet. Without treatment, text becomes illegible. Eventually the recorded data will disappear.

Binding Margin - Sometimes a book contains sheets in which the writing continues into the binding margin. To rebind and protect these sheets, encapsulation, not punching, is the only solution.

E. Preservation Procedures

The work order and individual documentation logs accompany the item throughout the entire process. Each batch of records is entered on a color-coded production control

board. Storage areas are color-coded to correspond to each batch or group of records. Records are housed in the same location throughout the project so that any given record may be located quickly.

- Documentation of Treatment
- Conservation Specifications
- Dismantle
- Surface Dry Cleaning
- Removal of Fasteners
- Mold Remediation
- Removal of Tape, Adhesives, Varnish, or Old Repairs
- Stain Reduction
- Washing in Water
- Flattening and Humidification
- Repair and Restore Paper

F. Timeline of the Project

Preservation projects are unique in that the work determines the schedule, response times, and completion date. Each job is individual and unique. The condition of the record determines how quickly it moves through the preservation process. Usually, older records suffer from extreme deterioration and require more attention. As the collection is processed in controlled batches and the age of the records decreases, production rate increases. The estimated timeline for completion is 16 weeks.

G. Final Outcome of the Project

Book and paper preservation protects indispensable records for hundreds of years. Preservation minimizes the chemical and physical deterioration of the page and prevents text loss. Its goal is to prolong the existence and useful life of the original. Occasionally, this includes preserving and removing the original from public access and creating a security copy.

The court records are very valuable sources of Texas' and Fort Bend County's history. In 2018 the Fort Bend County District Clerk's Office will open to the public a Historical Document Room for viewing historical documents. Some of the most badly deteriorated records that are to be restored and preserved by this project will be housed in this room. With the aid of this grant this mission will be accomplished.