

**II. PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE  
ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
REGISTER OF WILLS AND  
CLERK OF ORPHANS' COURT**

**June 1, 2004**

---

# Contents

---

Letter	1
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	10
Scope and Methodology	12
Findings and Recommendations	13
Appendix I: Response of the Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court	43

March 5, 2004

Honorable Eileen Wagner  
Register of Wills and  
Clerk of Orphans' Court  
First Floor, City-County Building  
414 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

**SUBJECT:      PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY**  
**REGISTER OF WILLS AND CLERK OF ORPHANS' COURT**

The Honorable Eileen Wagner:

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court in accordance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. Our objectives were to evaluate 1) the economy and efficiency of operations; 2) the utilization of information technology; and 3) human resource policies and practices and other miscellaneous matters.

Our audit noted that the Register of Wills' Office is effective at performing their statutory functions. However, there are many opportunities for greater efficiency. Many of the current processes were designed for a manual operating environment. Since the introduction of the Banner Courts System in 1990, the office has become increasingly automated and many of the old processes are now out of date. Specifically, our review disclosed that:

- The office can be more productive. We estimate that process improvements will enable the reassignment or reduction of 11-15 positions. Also, imaging of documents needs to be accelerated and more organized. At the current rate of scanning, all the documents will not be scanned for several decades,
- The office can improve efficiency and standardize more widely applied policies and procedures by increasing their use of information technology,
- Additional human resource policies and guidelines should be created. Cross-training of personnel and the redesign and reengineering of some positions, will enhance productivity. In addition, filing fees charged by the Register's office have not kept pace with inflation. In the last 14 years the consumer price index rose 42% while filing fees rose 9%.

We also recommend that internal controls be strengthened through the implementation of recommendations detailed in the attached report.

The newly elected Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court cooperated with our audit efforts and was instrumental in identifying areas needing improvement. The number of employees in the Register of Wills' Office has been reduced by approximately 20% since the conclusion of our audit. We would like to thank the Register of Wills for the courtesy and cooperation extended to us by management and staff during this audit.

Very truly yours,

Robert J. Lentz  
Acting Assistant Deputy, Auditing

MARK PATRICK FLAHERTY  
Controller

## *Executive Summary*

---

### **Purpose of Review**

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court in order to provide an independent assessment of the performance and management of the office against objective criteria. In particular, we evaluated: 1) the economy and efficiency of office operations; 2) the utilization of information technology; and 3) human resource policies and practices and other miscellaneous matters. Our fieldwork was conducted during January and February of 2004.

### **Background**

A newly elected Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court took office January 2, 2004 and requested a performance audit to identify areas requiring attention. The Register of Wills' Office (Register's Office) probates wills and all related filings, grants letters testamentary and, in cases where persons die without leaving a will, letters of administration, issues subpoenas and trustee certificates; administers oaths; and adjudicates probate disputes. The Register is also the Commonwealth's agent for the collection of Pennsylvania's inheritance tax; and the custodian of records relating to wills, letters of administration, estate inventories, inheritance tax records, and other estate records. The Register charges and collects fees for performing the above services.

The Register's Office serves in a separate capacity as Clerk of the Orphans' Court Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. As Clerk of Orphans' Court, the Register processes filings and maintains records pertaining to adoptions, guardianships, civil commitments, decrees of distribution, claims by minors, and incapacitated persons. The Clerk of Orphans' Court also issues marriage licenses, keeps marriage records, issues certified copies of marriage records upon request, and maintains birth and death records for certain years (varies by community) prior to 1906, after which date records are maintained by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Office has 61 employees who are divided into nine different sections. They are: Probate, Orphans' Court, Inheritance Tax, Marriage License, Index, Transcribing, Records, Administration and Index/Files. The Office of the

## *Executive Summary*

---

Register of Wills and the Clerk of the Orphans' Court were established by Acts of the State of Pennsylvania. The Register is subject to a number of State and Federal regulations that govern many aspects of the office.

The Register of Wills is distinct from the other Row Offices in that it operates in a judicial capacity. The Register probates estates in dispute and issues orders to settle the matter. The Register's order may then be appealed to the Orphans' Court. In order to maintain a separation of powers, this initial order must be made outside of the Courts.

The Office uses three different computer systems: the Banner Courts document tracking system, the IMR document imaging system and the County network. The Banner Courts system was first implemented in 1990 and runs on a Sun server located off-site at the Allegheny County Department of Computer Services (DCS). Banner Courts is used to record the receipt of filings and index them for ease of retrieval. A separate database in Banner Courts records marriage licenses. The IMR imaging system runs on a server located on-site. It stores electronic images of documents received each day at the Probate and Clerk of Orphans' Court counters. It also stores copies of documents filed in prior years that are being scanned by the Marriage License and Records Sections. The network is used for word processing, e-mail, etc., and is jointly administered by DCS and the Register's Office.

### **Results in Brief**

Our audit disclosed the following:

#### Workflow

- The Register's Office can be made more productive. We estimate cross-training and automation will allow reassignment or reduction of 11-15 positions and still meet the current workload requirements.
- The Index Section no longer performs a required function in the Register's Office.

## *Executive Summary*

---

- Using “volume” and “page” numbers to index filed documents is no longer necessary since this method of archival is no longer used.
- Manual generation of index cards in the Transcribing Section can be eliminated.
- Marriage licensing is a very manual process that can be further automated.
- Employees need to be cross-trained and job descriptions expanded.

### Information Technology

- There is no authorized timetable to complete the backlog of scanning. At the current rate of production, it will take many decades to scan all the documents in the Office.
- Document workflow of papers filed with Probate and the Clerk of Orphans’ Court can be simplified by relocating the scanner to a location that is convenient to both functions.
- The function of providing birth and death records can be streamlined.
- There is no confirmation that documents entered into Banner Courts computer system are also accurately entered into the IMR scanning system.
- There is no verification that each page of a document is scanned.
- Form letters are generated manually, taking substantial staff time.
- Web-based technology is underused.
- A large number of calls received are for other County offices, resulting in receptionists spending significant time transferring calls.

## *Executive Summary*

---

- Most customers are provided original documents when scanned images are available and acceptable.
- Three copies of most documents are retained. There is a hardcopy, a scanned image, and microfilm. State law does not require retention of all three copies.
- The IMR server is not well protected from fire hazards.
- Risks related to the scanning function need to be addressed in a separate written policy and procedure manual.

### Human Services and Other

- Filing fee increases have not kept pace with inflation. Since 1990 the fees set by the Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court increased 9% while the consumer price index increased 42%.
- All marriage applications can be issued through the downtown office.
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Archives and Records Management Grants for document archival should be pursued.
- Accountability for office-wide scanning can be improved by assigning supervisory responsibility to one individual.
- Physical safeguards surrounding archived electronic information from the scanning server can be improved.
- Records of software licenses are not retained.
- There is no written policies and procedures manual for each section.
- There are no position descriptions.

## *Executive Summary*

---

- There is no written and authorized compensation policy.
- Documentation in personnel files is lacking.

### **Conclusion**

Our audit noted the Register of Wills' Office is effective at performing their statutory functions. However, there are many opportunities for greater efficiency. Many of the current processes were designed for a manual operating environment. Since the introduction of Banner Courts in 1990, the Office has become increasingly automated and many of the old processes are now out of date. Automation should be used for continuous process improvement and standardization of more widely applied policies and procedures. Job descriptions need to be redesigned to facilitate cross training while lack of productivity is addressed.

The newly elected Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court cooperated with our audit efforts and was instrumental in identifying areas needing improvement.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, we recommend the Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court:

#### Workflow

- Evaluate staffing needs and determine if a reduction in force can be implemented;
- Consider eliminating the Index Section as part of the evaluation of staffing needs;
- Eliminate the use of "volume" and "page" numbers when indexing documents, since docket books are no longer used;
- Cease preparation and maintenance of the manually prepared index cards for cases opened after 1990;

## *Executive Summary*

---

- Consider upgrading technology used in the Marriage License Section to allow customer self-service;
- Cross-train employees in order to maximize efficiency;

### Information Technology

- Establish a realistic timetable for scanning documents;
- Reposition the scanning and indexing operation for currently filed documents from the Transcribing Section to the main counter area on the first floor;
- Reengineer the process of providing birth and death records to the public;
- Develop a process to ensure that documents entered into Banner Courts are also accurately entered into the IMR scanning system;
- Verify that each page has been scanned by preparing input control totals, programming the scanning machine to show how many pages were actually scanned, and comparing the input and output processing controls and resolving any discrepancies;
- Automate the generation of routine form letters;
- Explore increased use of web-based technology;
- Use an automated phone answering system to increase efficiency of receptionists;
- Increase public knowledge and usage of existing office technology;
- Pursue reducing the number of hardcopy documents retained on-site;
- Enhance physical security of the IMR server by providing better fire protection;

## *Executive Summary*

---

- Create and distribute an approved scanning policy and procedure manual;

### Human Resources and Other

- Index filing fee rates to the consumer price index;
- Close the Marriage License satellite centers;
- Seek grants to fund record archival;
- Consolidate managerial responsibility for record retention and scanning into one position;
- Store CD ROMs, kept on-site, in a more secure storage area;
- Institute a policy to maintain and safely store licensing information for all new software purchases;
- Write and approve a sectional policy and procedure manuals;
- Write position descriptions for the Office;
- Implement a written and authorized compensation policy; and
- Ensure that proper documentation is stored in employee personnel files.

## **I. Introduction**

---

The Office of the Register of Wills and the Clerk of the Orphans' Court were established by Acts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Register is subject to a number of State and Federal regulations that govern most aspects of the office. A newly elected Register took office January 2, 2004.

The Office has 61 employees who are divided into nine different Sections. They are: Probate, Orphans' Court, Inheritance Tax, Marriage License, Index, Transcribing, Records, Administration and Index/Files. The Administration includes the Register and the upper layers of management that set policy for the office. In addition, the Office has a solicitor, human resources officer, cashiers, and a number of support personnel.

The Register of Wills' Office Probate Section probates wills and related filings to ensure that they are complete and correct. The Section grants letters testamentary, trustee certificates, and, in cases where persons die without leaving a will, letters of administration. Probate also coordinates mediation of contested estates. Unresolved disputes go to a hearing with the Register.

The Register's Office also serves in a separate capacity as Clerk of the Orphans' Court Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. As Clerk of Orphans' Court, the Register processes filings and maintains records pertaining to adoptions, guardianships, civil commitments, decrees of distribution, claims by minors, and incapacitated persons. The Section issues subpoenas, advertises the final accounting of estates, and prepares written Judge's orders.

The Marriage License Section takes applications for and issues marriage licenses. The Section scans and stores marriage records, and issues certified copies of marriage records upon request.

The Inheritance Tax Section acts as an agent for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Section accepts inheritance tax returns and payments, and forwards them to the State. The Section is responsible for storing the original tax returns and related filings. The Commonwealth returns a variable percentage of payments each month in the form of a commission check.

## **I. Introduction**

---

The Transcribing Section assigns a volume and page number, reviews for completeness, and scans and files most documents that are accepted by Probate and the Clerk of Orphans' Court. The Section also coordinates the storage of documents off-site and maintains birth and death records for certain years (varies by community) prior to 1906, after which date records are maintained by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Index/Files, Index, and Records Sections are tasked with separate aspects of filing and storing the paper documents from Transcribing. These are the Sections that customers go to in order to retrieve documents, which are stored both on-site and at several storage facilities, depending on age.

The Register of Wills is distinct from the other Row Offices in that it operates with a judicial capacity. The Register probates estates in dispute and issues an order to settle the matter. The Register's order may then be appealed to the Orphans' Court. In order to maintain a separation of powers, this initial order must be made outside of the Courts.

The Office uses three different computer systems; the Banner Courts document tracking system, the IMR document imaging system and the County network. The Banner Courts system was first implemented in 1990 and runs on a Sun server located off-site at the Allegheny County Section of Computer Services (DCS). Banner Courts is used to record the receipt of filings and index them for ease of retrieval. A separate database on Banner records marriage licenses. The IMR imaging system runs on a server located on-site. It stores electronic copies of documents received daily at the counters for the Probate and Clerk of Orphans' Court. It also stores copies of documents filed in prior years that are being scanned by the Marriage License and Records Sections. The network is used for word processing, e-mail, etc., and is jointly administered by DCS and the Register's Office.

## II. Scope & Methodology

---

We completed a performance audit of the Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court to provide an independent assessment of the performance and management of the Office against objective criteria. In particular, we evaluated: 1) the economy and efficiency of office operations; 2) the utilization of information technology; and 3) human resource policies and practices and other miscellaneous matters. We:

- Performed analytical procedures and metrics for productivity within each section;
- Assessed whether policies and procedures were in place to effectively control program risks;
- Interviewed and observed Register's Office personnel to obtain an understanding of their duties;
- Determined if daily functions are required by statute or court order;
- Flowcharted workflow processes to assess efficiency;
- Examined filing fees charged from 1990 through 2004;
- Evaluated adequacy and utilization of information technology;
- Reviewed personnel files and policies for completeness and propriety; and
- Reviewed expenditures against the 2003 budget for reasonableness.

We conducted our review during January and February 2004. We provided a draft copy of this report for comment to the Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court. The response to the recommendations is presented in Appendix I, at page 43.

### III. Findings and Recommendations

---

#### Index of Findings and Recommendations

<u>Workflow</u>	<i>Page</i>
Increasing Efficiency .....	14 & 15
Index Section Necessity.....	16
Eliminate "Volume" and "Page" Number.....	17
Manual Generation of Index Cards.....	18
Automate Marriage Section.....	19
Need for Cross-training.....	20
<u>Information Technology</u>	
Scanning Timetable.....	21
Scanner Behind Main Counter.....	22
Reengineer Administration of Birth and Death Records.....	23
Parity Between Banner Courts and IMR.....	24
Scanning Input and Output Controls.....	25
Automation of Routinely Generated Letters.....	26
Increased Use of Web-based Technology.....	27
Make Office Technology More User-friendly.....	28
Use of automated phone system.....	29
Paperless Office.....	30
Fire Protection for IMR Server.....	31
Scanning Policy.....	32
<u>Human Resources and Other</u>	
Fee Increases.....	33
Closure of Marriage License Satellite Centers.....	34
Grants for Archiving Records.....	35
Centralization of Scanning Responsibility.....	36
Storage of CD ROMs.....	37
Software Licenses.....	38
Sectional Policies and Procedures.....	39
Creation of Position Descriptions.....	40
Development of a Compensation Strategy .....	41
Adequate Documentation in Personnel Files.....	42

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Increasing Efficiency**

As with every restructuring organization that adjusts to automation and changing business needs, the Register of Wills' Office can operate more efficiently. Prior to 1990, staff was hired to service periods of peak volume with highly specialized job descriptions (see "Need for Cross-training" finding at page 20). The Office was paper intensive and the manual systems designed to handle the activity required a certain level of effort. The implementation of Banner Courts in 1990 signaled the beginning of office automation. As more sophisticated technology became available over the years, fewer personnel were needed to accomplish the same tasks. However, staffing levels remained constant.

As part of our audit fieldwork we flowcharted workflow, reviewed job descriptions/employee questionnaires, performed analytical review procedures, interviewed personnel, and visually observed documentation and other aspects of the operation. We estimate that with no additional automation, the Office could handle its present work load with 11 fewer full-time positions. If other related audit recommendations are implemented, with no shifting of additional resources to scanning, another four full-time positions may not be necessary. The estimated new staffing level scenarios by section are depicted in a chart on the following page.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills evaluate staffing needs and determine if a restructuring of processes should be completed.

### III. Findings and Recommendations

---

#### Increasing Efficiency - Continued

##### Staffing Scenarios

<u>Section/Function</u>	<u>Current Full-Time Employees</u>	<u>Proposed Full-Time Employees</u>	<u>Proposed with other Audit Recommendations</u>
Administration	8	7	7
Cashiers	3	2	2
Inheritance Tax	10	9	9
Marriage Section	10	8	6
Orphans' Court	5	3	3
Probate	7	5	5
Index	2	0	0
Index/Files *	3	0	0
Transcribing *	10	0	0
Records & Supplies *	3	0	0
Records & Scanning (New) *	<u>0</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>14</u>
	61	50	46

\* Section merged into newly created Records & Scanning Dept. under proposed plan

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Index Section Necessity**

The Index Section does not perform a unique function in the Register of Wills' Office. In 1997, the indexing of all documents was computerized and assigned to the Transcribing Section. While the Index Section was stripped of its role in the Office, the employees were not reassigned. Essentially, the two employees of the Indexing Section do not have responsibility for any specific tasks. They assist the Probate and Clerk of Orphans' Court Sections as needed.

A standard of organizational design is that each section should have a distinct role in an office. The designation of a section conveys strict lines of responsibility and supervision; however improper designation decreases the flexibility of an office. In general, an office should only have as many sections as needed.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills determine the necessity of the Index Section and evaluate the appropriateness of staffing levels.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Eliminate "Volume" and "Page" Number**

The process of filing records can be streamlined. Prior to 1990, part of the manual filing process was to hand stamp the "volume" and "page" number on each document. The documents were then put into a docket book that was assigned its own volume number. Most volumes contained up to 1100 pages of documents. Whenever a document needed to be retrieved, it was accessed by volume and page. Since 2000, hardcopies are no longer filed in docket books by volume and page number. They are now filed in folders, and retrieved by "case id" number. The volume and page number are still assigned and manually entered into both the Banner Courts and IMR systems, though they are no longer necessary to file, retain and retrieve documents.

Best business practices require the elimination of non-value-added tasks that do not serve a useful purpose. Elimination of these steps will significantly decrease the amount of time required to file documents in the Register's Office.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills consider changing the document filing process to exclude the use of volume and page numbers.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Manual Generation of Index Cards**

There is a duplication of effort in the Transcribing Section. Manual index cards are maintained for files opened after 1990. These cards contain the same information already entered in the Banner Courts' and IMR scanning systems. The manual index cards were used to record filing information relevant to the Orphans' Courts documents received in the Transcribing Section before 1990. When the Banner Courts and IMR scanning systems were implemented, they both required input of all the same information being transcribed on the index cards. However, the Transcribing Section has continued to maintain the manual index cards.

Sound business principles require workflow processes to be as efficient as possible. The effort used to create hardcopy index cards of information already contained in both the Banner Courts and IMR systems expends time that could be applied to other tasks. If the Register's Office wishes to retain a hardcopy record of files opened after 1990, a computer report of the exact same information could be generated.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Transcribing Section discontinue maintenance of the card index file for cases opened after 1990.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Automate the Marriage Section**

Marriage licensing is a very manual process that can benefit from further automation. A clerk manually enters basic applicant information including name, address, prior marriage information, and education into the marriage licensing computer system.

Automation would lower the personnel costs associated with taking marriage applications. As part of our review of workflow and staffing levels, we reviewed the number of applications taken throughout the year in this Section. There are currently five employees dedicated to taking applications plus a receptionist. Introducing self-serve computer terminals in the marriage license waiting area to electronically process the application and collect the fee will allow applicants to complete the initial application process without a clerk. A clerk's responsibility would then be limited to checking identification and issuing the license. We estimate this automation could reduce the manpower requirements to two full-time positions.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills consider upgrading technology to allow customer self-service and evaluate manpower requirements in the Marriage License Section.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Need for Cross-training**

The tasks performed by many employees can be expanded. Employees in private industry are routinely cross-trained to fill multiple roles as the work volume in an office dictates.

Traditionally, there has been a strict division of duties in the Register of Wills' Office. These narrow job descriptions are a cause of lost productivity. Each section is currently staffed to handle peak volume. As a result, the Office is overstaffed at different times during the day and year. With proper training, non-busy workers could dramatically increase throughput at the scanners, assist customers at other counters, fill mail-in requests or perform other miscellaneous tasks.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills consider cross-training employees in order to maximize the efficiency of the Office.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Scanning Timetable**

A timetable for completing the backlog of scanning should be established. Currently, three of the four scanners are wholly dedicated to scanning documents filed in storage. At current rates of production, the backlog will not be completed for several decades.

Good project management uses timelines as a tool to attain goals. An authorized timetable establishes tangible goals that can be clearly communicated to staff, and that management can use as a guide when allocating resources to accomplish tasks. Scanning documents reduces the number of lost or mangled documents associated with hardcopy, allows more secure and enduring storage, and speeds the process of document retrieval.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills:

1. Establish a document scanning timetable, and;
2. Dedicate the resources necessary to accomplish it.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Scanner Behind Main Counter**

The recording process for papers filed with Probate and Clerk of Orphans' Court can be simplified. These papers are originally filed at the counter on the main floor. Then they are taken upstairs to the Transcribing Section where they are entered into a log book, sorted, stamped with a volume and page number and prepared for scanning and indexing. Post scanning and indexing logs are prepared, volume and page is entered into Banner Courts and the documents are filed in folders and shelved.

When this process was originally created several decades ago, it was a very effective way of retaining control over filed documents. Good business principles require workflow processes to be efficient and new technology should be used to improve the Register's Office workflow. Excessive handling of documents, with the corresponding responsibility for processing them, spread out over several Sections creates unnecessary work. Relocating the scanning/indexing operation behind the main counter on the first floor will eliminate document handling and some of the logs that are used to track documents. It will also consolidate responsibility for scanning documents within the same section that receives the documents, thereby improving accountability.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend that Register of Wills consider moving the scanning/indexing operation of currently filed documents to the main counter area.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Reengineer Administration of Birth and Death Records**

The process that services birth and death records can be more productive. Responding to requests for birth and death records by manual retrieval of microfilm occupies a full time employee a maximum of 70% of the time. Changing the process would result in better use of employee time.

One solution is to ask the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to assume responsibility for these birth and death records since they already process all requests for birth and death records dated after 1906. This would shift the burden of this task from the County.

A second alternative is to scan all the records. We estimate this will cost no more than \$16,000 and reduce the time it takes to fill each request. The position that is presently wholly dedicated to this task could be given other tasks within the Register's Office. Walk-in requests could be serviced by any available clerk when the customer rings a bell for service. The remaining 90% of requests, received through the mail, could be completed by other employees during down-time.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills reengineer the process of providing copies of birth and death records to the public.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Parity between Banner Courts and IMR**

There should be confirmation that documents entered into Banner Courts are scanned and accurately indexed in IMR.

Confirming that items entered into Banner Courts are also entered into the IMR scanning system will ensure the completeness and integrity of the scanning record retention system. An ad hoc report can be run off of Banner Courts listing all the documents entered for a particular day. Staff could then compare the “case id” and “last name” for each item to those scanned into the IMR system. Any variances should be investigated and resolved.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills take steps to ensure that all documents entered into Banner Courts are accurately entered into the IMR scanning system.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Scanning Input and Output Controls**

There is no verification that each page has actually been scanned at each of the four imaging stations in the Register's Office. Two scanning stations are located in the Transcribing Section, another in the Marriage License Section and a fourth in the Records Section.

Input and output processing controls are used to verify the completeness of documents entered into a computer system. If documents are not scanned, they will not be readily available to the public. An improperly scanned document could be lost forever if the Register's Office decided to switch over to a completely paperless system. One type of input processing control is to provide a manual page count before a document is scanned. A corresponding output processing control would be used to view how many pages were scanned into the machine. The input and output processing control totals are then compared to verify the completeness of documents entered into the system.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills:

1. Prepare input control totals;
2. Program the scanning machines to show how many pages were actually scanned; and,
3. Compare the input and output processing controls and resolve any discrepancies.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Automation of Routinely Generated Letters**

Employees manually enter addresses into their word processing program for letters of certification, delinquent status reports, 5.6 filings, and inventory letters; print the letters and mail them. The addresses are obtained from a printout generated from Banner Courts by the Computer Assistant.

Best business practices require workflow processes to be as efficient as possible. The process will be completed much quicker if handled by either a mail merge or a report generated from Oracle that automatically prints signed letters. The job can be set up to run daily, weekly or whenever a pre-determined number of letters have to be run.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills automate the generation of routine letters.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Increased Use of Web-based Technology**

The Office should make good use of web-based technology to reassign and reduce manpower requirements. The website should be organized in a manner that makes it easy for the public to use. Currently, the public's ability to access information is limited.

The reliability and security of these applications has been proven, and they are widely used in both government and private industry. Adding a frequently asked questions area for each section would increase the utility of the site. Future improvements could allow filings and payments to be accepted online, and scanned images to be accessible from any computer. Fees for the convenience of using the web-site can provide an additional source of revenue. The web-site is an extension of the Office that, at best, allows customers to find all the information needed and make the filings online.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills explore increased use of web-based technology to improve operations.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Make Office Technology More User - friendly**

Staff spends a large amount of time assisting customers in finding and retrieving documents. Most customers request original documents, while the scanned images are readily available at on-site terminals that would serve customer needs. While there are two self-serve public terminals, they are underused. In part this is due to the fact the public may not be aware the terminals exist and there are no signs, guides, or pamphlets explaining how to use the terminals. The terminals are also placed in an out of the way location without adequate seating.

The task of assisting customers is currently accomplished with three full-time employees. If the customer used the public terminal, no staff time would be required and the customer could still obtain printouts of original documents.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills work to increase public knowledge and usage of existing office technology.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Use of automated phone system**

The Register of Wills' receptionists currently spend a significant part of their workday redirecting phone calls to other Sections in the Register of Wills' Office and to other County Offices. According to the receptionist, this occurs because of an incorrect listing in the telephone book. The phone book lists the Register of Wills' phone number next to an "Information" title. In addition, past administrations preferred having an actual person answer the phones to present a more personal service to the public.

It is a common business practice to automate repetitive tasks, such as these, when the result will be a time and cost savings. As part of our fieldwork, we tracked calls for half of one day. In that time period, the receptionist answered 30 calls of this type. With an automated phone answering system, callers will be able to direct themselves to the Section that they need to speak with, and callers that are not sure will still be able to dial "0" to speak with the receptionist. The need for receptionists to answer phones will be greatly reduced, freeing their time to complete more value added tasks.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills:

1. Use an automated phone answering system; and
2. Change the listing in the phone book.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Paperless Office**

Three copies of most documents are retained. There is a hardcopy, a scanned image, and microfilm. Pennsylvania law allows hardcopy records to be destroyed as long as microfilm copies are maintained. If records are classified as permanent records, approval from the Pennsylvania County Records Committee is required.

If the application to the PA County Records Committee is rejected, there are alternative means of reducing hardcopy that could be considered. For example, 16 P.S. 3405 states that "Public records stored outside of the county seat shall be made accessible to the general public by means of an electronic telecopying system or facility which will permit...exact copies." After being scanned, the documents could be moved to a long-term storage facility.

Reducing or eliminating storage of hardcopy will save costs of off-site storage, free space used for storage in the City-County building, and encourage the use of electronic storage and retrieval. These measures would dramatically reduce personnel costs associated with document storage and retrieval.

If the Register's Office prefers to retain hardcopies of wills to facilitate settling disputes, they could be retained until it is deemed safe to dispose of them. That is, when the assets from the estate have been distributed and the statute of limitations has expired.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills pursue alternatives to retaining all hardcopy documents.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Fire Protection for IMR Server**

The IMR server room should be adequately protected against fire hazards. Currently there is no fire extinguisher in the near vicinity of the server room and smoke detectors are not tested on a regular basis.

Sound operating procedures advise the protection of servers with a fire prevention device, preferably a system that does not use water (e.g. Halon system). At one time, the Register of Wills' Office made inquiries into the cost of locating their IMR server in the fire-protected safety of the Allegheny County Department of Computer Services (DCS) computer room. However, this option was deemed too expensive.

One physical security enhancement for the IMR server is to place it under the supervision of DCS. Another way to enhance physical security is to install automatic fire-extinguishing equipment in the room in which the server is currently housed.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills ensure the physical security of the IMR server.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Scanning Policy**

The Register's Office needs a written and approved policy and procedures manual for the scanning operation. This vital office function crosses sectional lines. Currently, there are four different scanners located in three different sections. Each section performs the scanning and indexing operation in a different way (see finding on page 36). There is no standard way to confirm that all documents are entered into the system (see finding on page 25), verify the integrity of the image, establish daily quotas for each scanner, set up a timetable for the scanning of the backlog of documents to be scanned, nor set policy for archival that complies with the standards adopted by the Pennsylvania County Records Committee and other relevant laws and regulations.

Scanning is a relatively new operation in the office that still needs to be properly organized. The purpose of a scanning policy and procedures manual is to provide clear communication to employees of management's intention regarding the imaging process and to assign responsibility for associated tasks. It may be used as both a training manual and as a reference guide, which will assist in maintaining the continuity of operation in the event of a change in personnel.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills write and distribute an approved scanning policy and procedure manual.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Fee Increases**

Filing fees charges by the Register's Office should keep pace with inflation. Sound fiscal policy is to increase fees at approximately the same rate as the cost of living.

The Register's Office should consider raising most fees and obtain the approval of the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Only 35% of those individual fees were increased from 1990 to 2004. The remaining 65% of fees did not increase at all since 1990. During the same period the consumer price index rose 42%.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills ensure individual fees keep pace with the increases in the consumer price index.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Closure of Marriage License Satellite Centers**

The Marriage License satellite centers could be eliminated. All marriage applications can be issued through either the downtown office or via the development of an Internet application.

Because the satellite centers are operated with existing staff in donated municipal space, the perception is the centers have no cost. In fact, compensatory time is structured to allow each employee who volunteers to work in a satellite center to work about three hours while receiving credit for a full day of work.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills consider closing the Marriage License satellite centers.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Grants for Archiving Records**

There are thousands of pages of old documents, some dating to the 1700's, that are not properly archived. Many of the documents are now becoming too brittle to handle and will eventually disintegrate. If not properly preserved, these documents will become unusable. The Register of Wills' Office does not have the funds or expertise to preserve these documents.

The Pennsylvania County Record Committee requires documents classified as "permanent" to be preserved or scanned into an electronic format that will last indefinitely.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission offers Archives and Records Management grants for documents that date prior to the 1950's. According to the Commission, "the grants are available annually to help Pennsylvania municipal and county governments and school districts preserve historically valuable records and make them more accessible to the public. The grants can be used to acquire professional assistance, purchase archival supplies or equipment, or to aid in the processing and reformatting of archival collections." An annual amount up to \$15,000 can be awarded with a matching contribution.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills seek grants for archiving records.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Centralization of Scanning Responsibility**

Accountability for office-wide scanning can be improved by assigning responsibility to one individual. Currently, four different scanners are located in three different sections and each section performs the scanning and indexing operation in a different way. There is no standard way to confirm that all documents are entered into the system, verify the integrity of the image, schedule the backlog of documents to be scanned nor set policy for archival of images.

Scanning is a relatively new operation that still needs to be properly organized. Concentrating overall responsibility for an important business process in one person promotes uniform practices while facilitating decision-making. Assigning the responsibility for scanning and record retention to one individual will facilitate the application of best practices and the creation of an authorized scanning policy.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills consolidate managerial responsibility for record retention and scanning with one individual.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Storage of CD ROMs**

CD ROM disks used to archive electronic information from the scanning server are stored in a regular filing cabinet. Archived data needs to be protected in a safe and secure location.

If archived data is not available when needed, the services the Register's Office provides to the public will come to a halt. Though one copy of the CD ROMs are stored off-site, the on-site copy can be better safeguarded by keeping the CD ROMs in a fire proof safe.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills store the CD ROMs, kept on-site, in a more secure storage area.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Software Licenses**

The Register of Wills' Office does not have records of software licenses for four copies of Corel Word Perfect and 13 copies of Word Perfect 6, that are currently installed on their computers.

Copyright laws require that software installed on computers have valid licenses. Maintaining licensing records of all pieces of software installed on office computers will evidence compliance with copyright laws.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills create and institute a policy to maintain and safely store licensing information for all new software purchases.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Sectional Policies and Procedures**

The Allegheny County Register of Wills should have written and authorized sectional policies and procedures manuals.

Written and approved sectional policies and procedures manuals clearly communicate management's intention regarding treatment of sectional matters and assigns responsibilities for associated tasks. These manuals will serve as both a training handbook and a reference guide that will assist in maintaining the continuity of operations in the event of a change of personnel. Exceptional manuals will include documentation of the functions of the Section and set forth authorization for sectional functions and control procedures to be monitored by management.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills ensure that written and approved sectional and human resources policies and procedures manuals are created.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Creation of Position Descriptions**

The Register's Office does not have defined position descriptions. Good human resources procedures emphasize that employee positions be clearly defined.

There was no Human Resources Officer position in the Register of Wills' Office before the beginning of the year 2004. The new Officer has recently had all employees in the Register of Wills' Office fill out a questionnaire that partially describe their current responsibilities.

Position descriptions will help employees understand their tasks and responsibilities and serve as a basis for establishing an organizational structure and compensation policy.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills adopt authorized position descriptions for the Office.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Development of a Compensation Strategy**

The Register of Wills should have a strategy to determine how compensation is determined. The projected 2004 salary expense exceeds the budget by approximately \$135,000. This occurred in part because 2003 merit raises were not offset against scheduled union raises as required by the prevailing labor agreement.

Good human resources management requires that a well-defined compensation strategy be developed, indicating the criteria on which pay increases are based. All of the 2003 management and confidential raises were given prior to the current administration, thus there could be no determination on how employees were selected for raises.

A compensation strategy will help management to define what factors to evaluate when awarding raises; and determine whether the Office has funds for raises. The compensation strategy should also serve as a guide to ensure management complies with union regulations.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Human Resources Officer create a compensation strategy to be approved and implemented by the Register of Wills.

### **III. Findings and Recommendations**

---

#### **Adequate Documentation in Personnel Files**

Several employee personnel files do not contain documentation of hiring, changes in position, and/or merit raises.

Best business practices indicate records should document changes in compensation and employment status. A complete personnel file will allow management to track the progress of employees, assist in preparing evaluations, and will serve as a reference for the qualifications of an employee. The current administration indicated personnel files may have been discarded before the prior administration left office.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend the Register of Wills develop and implement a policy to ensure proper documentation is contained in employee personnel files.