

Liberty County Historical Real Estate Records Now Online

Clerk's Efforts to Digitize Deeds, Liens, and Plats Becoming a Reality

Liberty County's Clerk of Superior Court, F. Barry Wilkes, began in-house efforts almost ten years ago to re-create all land records filed in the clerk's office since 1789 but, due to lack of funding and personnel the project was an undertaking that became, according to Wilkes, "intermittent, at best, with the prospects of completing the project becoming virtually impossible."

So, to hasten the project, Wilkes contracted three years ago with Iron Data (the software company that provides the local court clerk's office software for electronically indexing and imaging real estate records) to re-create in digital format all real estate instruments, including deeds and plats, filed in the office since 1789, when the office was first created and land records of Liberty County began being filed with the clerk of the superior court. Funding for the project was, and continues to be, provided by external sources and, according to Wilkes, has not cost local taxpayers or other taxpayers of the state anything.

He is adamant that the land re-creation project is one of the greatest investments that he, any other local, state, or federal governmental agency or elected official has or could ever champion. "Long-term preservation of citizens' land records is an absolute necessity. Without reliable land records, ownership of property cannot be proven, lien rights of lending institutions, government agencies and private citizens cannot be protected, and delineation of property lines and boundaries cannot be established, disputed, and/or enforced. Liberty County is situated in an area very susceptible to a natural disasters—hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and even earthquakes—that could prove disastrous to land and court records. It is also houses most of the largest military installation east of the Mississippi River and is therefore in a high risk zone for terrorism. Realizing this and taking very seriously my sworn duties as the elected official who, by law, is responsible for protecting and preserving and guaranteeing the authenticity of those records, I had to find a better methodology for creating and preserving 'backups' of all land records so that, in the event of a natural disaster other catastrophe, no records are lost, damaged, or destroyed. Historically, microfilm was the best methodology but, in light of the evolution of technology employed in the Clerk's Office, which has changed. Currently, we receive, record, and provide public access to court and land records on a digital medium. So, after carefully considering all variables, I decided that the only viable option was to electronically re-create land records and, once finished, to have repetitive backups of the data stored in various off-site facilities locally and outside Liberty County," Wilkes explained.

When land records were archived using microfilm, it would take months, or possibly even years, to obtain copies of deeds, liens, and plats in the event of a disaster. Now, Wilkes said, copies of all real estate instruments can be retrieved and restored to the Clerk's Office file servers almost instantaneously since exact copies of the records are stored on four secure local file servers and various digital archival sites provided by the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority (GSCCCA) at "secret locations

that provide ultimate protection.” GSCCCA is the state agency statutorily responsible for creating and operating a statewide, online system for providing access to land records of Georgia’s 159 counties.

All re-created historical land records must be indexed and digitally imaged by indexers certified by the GSCCCA and pursuant to rigid standards it has promulgated to ensure the integrity, authenticity, and accuracy of data on its online system. Deeds available on the GSCCCA network for most counties of the state currently date back to 1992.

Iron Data began working on the re-creation project in 2012. Deeds for Liberty County dating back to 1977 and land plats to 1986 are accessible on the GSCCCA website at www.gsccca.org or locally on the Clerk’s Office network using computers provided in the office’s real estate vault in the Liberty County Justice Center (Suite 1200).

“Most land records for Liberty County have been filed during my tenure as clerk, with the boom in land transactions beginning circa 1975. So, Iron Data has already re-created the largest amount of deeds and plats of record and should now proceed rapidly, although deciphering information from our most historical records, most which were hand-written by the clerk in office at the time, may prolong the project. However, I am very hopeful that, by the end of year, all land records will be available on the GSCCCA real estate site and, thus, accessible to everyone around the clock,” Wilkes concluded.