

# **HISTORY OF THE WORCESTER DISTRICT** **REGISTRY OF DEEDS**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ORIGINS OF WORCESTER COUNTY

The Worcester District Registry of Deeds has been recognized for the past several decades for its efficiency and for the courteous manner in which it serves the public. It continues today as one of the more self-sustaining functions of the Commonwealth.

On July 10, 1981 Worcester County and the Worcester District Registry of Deeds celebrated 250 years of continuous service to the people of the region. Since its formal inception in 1731 the Registry has known 15 registers, some of which served on an interim basis only. Through the years the Registry has matured into one of the more vital and stable offices in Central Massachusetts government.

In its infancy, the Registry was a sometimes little-noticed arm of the County. Worcester County and the Registry of Deeds can trace their origins to curious elements. In the early 1700's, people in Central Massachusetts opined that a new county, one that would better serve their needs, should be created. No effective lobbying effort was mounted though, and conversations of this nature were quietly dismissed.

In the 1700s, the Commonwealth recognized a legitimate need to create a county in Central Massachusetts. Worcester, though a small town in its formative years, was aligned to Middlesex County, which nominated Cambridge to host the County seat. A distance of forty miles does not seem long in contemporary times but it was a long traveled distance in the 18th Century. Other Central Massachusetts communities, among them Westborough, Shrewsbury and those as far west and north as Leicester and Lancaster, were also counted within the boundaries of Middlesex County as late as 1728. Residents of these towns felt an alienation from the processes of county government.

It was in 1728 that the good people of Lancaster launched an attempt to pressure the General Court (or the State Legislature as we know it today) into enacting legislation to create a new county in the central part of the state. The movement failed initially, but a successful one would follow, as

would several others, proposing to subdivide Worcester County. Lancaster's assumption of the role of petitioner in the first drama was due to its position as the oldest and most influential of all towns in the area. Because of its prestigious role in local affairs, the town was able to generate momentum and support in the Legislature. Oddly, Lancaster did not promote itself for the county seat at this particular time. Worcester, which would eventually be awarded this honor, remained neutral. Because it was a relatively young town with a population of only a few hundred, Worcester made no attempt to promote itself for the county seat. "It is not unlikely that Worcester citizens recognized their humble place in the scheme of political influence," author John Nelson wrote in his history of Worcester County.

While Worcester residents accepted their humble position in regional matters, the General Court recognized Worcester's geographic value as a centrally located town. The post roads also converged in Worcester. There was more at work than the town's coveted setting though. Judge Joseph Wilder, Lancaster's most persuasive orator, convinced the citizens of his town that should Lancaster be named shire town it could become a haven for undesirable elements. Criminals brought to trial would "naturally" bring with them such vices as gambling, drinking, fighting and racing horses in the village streets.

His arguments were powerful and even though Worcester would later prosper as the county seat there is no indication that the good people of Lancaster ever bemoaned their earlier decision. It was on April 2, 1731, that the General Court of the Commonwealth finally enacted legislation that provided for the incorporation of Worcester County. The text of the act was published three days later and declared: "...Worcester, Lancaster, Westborough, Shrewsbury, Southborough, Leicester, Rutland and Lunenburg (all from Middlesex County), Mendon, Woodstock (later to be released to the State of Connecticut), Oxford, Sutton, Uxbridge and land granted to several petitioners of Medfield (all in Suffolk County), Brookfield (from the County of Hampshire), and the South town laid out to the Narragansett soldiers...and all lands lying within said townships with the inhabitants thereon, shall from and after the 10th day of July, 1731, be and remain one entire

and distinct County by the name of Worcester, of which Worcester is to be the County or Shire town."

Today, 13 of the towns just mentioned are still part of Worcester County. There was yet another tale to be told when Worcester was named shire town. It was alleged, presumably by some of the townsfolk in Rutland, that when the General Court voted by a majority of one to recognize Worcester as shire town, the deciding vote was secured with a pint of whiskey offered as a bribe. Rutland was itself Worcester's chief competition in this campaign. There was no practical explanation for the members of the General Court to be so aroused when considering Rutland for the county seat. The town was situated a good distance from most towns in the proposed county and worse yet, it was in hill country which meant difficult wagon and horse rides to get there. But fortunately the people of Central Massachusetts were spared the inconvenience of traveling to Rutland because Worcester did win out, if only by a solitary vote, acquired of questionable means.

Worcester County, which covers approximately 1500 square miles, was the 10th county to be incorporated in Massachusetts. Established earlier were: Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, Hampshire, Barnstable, Bristol, Plymouth, Dukes and Nantucket Counties.

Worcester thrived after it became the county seat. In 1731, Sutton, Lancaster, Mendon, Brookfield and Woodstock all had greater populations and land valuations. The presence of the courthouse and county offices enabled Worcester to gain substantially in both respects, though it still trailed Sutton and Brookfield in size and wealth in 1790.

It should be noted that while the names adopted more than 200 years ago by the respective towns are still familiar to us today, but their boundaries have changed considerably. For example, a town like Lancaster could occupy the rank of wealthiest or largest community in 1731. But the town of Clinton originated when it drew its boundaries from within Lancaster's own boundaries. Such evolutions throughout the years account for reductions in land mass and even population in many of the towns that were once prominent in the county.

By 1885 Worcester had soared ahead of all other cities and towns in the county relative to wealth and population. More than 150 years after it was designated shire town for the county, Worcester's population was 68,389 and its property values exceeded \$58 million. Fitchburg was second in the county with 15,375 residents and land values of \$13 million. Fitchburg, through relentless politicking and protesting, had also become the home for county government in the Northern District.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COUNTY IS SUBDIVIDED

For several decades there were frequent efforts to persuade the General Court that another county should be established within Worcester County. People living in places such as Lunenburg, Lancaster and Westminster, (originally called the South Town) argued that the prohibitive travel distance to Worcester cut them off from the rest of the county. In terms of logic, however, it seems that no matter where the shire town should have been designated travel problems would exist. But to create another county merited consideration, if not adoption, by the General Court.

And listen the people on Beacon Hill did, as repeated attempts were made from 1734 to 1874 to gain the General Court's approval for creation of a second county in Central Massachusetts.

As the failures mounted, the tactics became more inspired. The petitioners called upon some of the greatest names in United States history to help the drive for passage of their legislation. Never mind that George Washington, Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln were deceased, they were nearly successful in delivering the crucial votes.

The first scheme to involve a man of national importance was entertained by the residents of Webster. They asked that the County of Webster be incorporated. To add weight to the proposal the idea was promoted closely after the death of statesman Daniel Webster. While sentiment favored the proponents, opponents held fast and the Legislature defeated the plan.

Ploy number two concerned the nation's first president.... or his memory to be precise. Of course, no patriotic member of the General Court could honorably reject anything bearing Washington's name...but it did! The last legitimate move to create a new county surfaced in 1874. This time, Abraham Lincoln and his legacy were summoned to supply the necessary votes. But the General Court, probably because by now it was amply familiar with what was being done, rejected the motion. And the proposed Lincoln County went the way of the proposed Webster and Washington Counties.

When travel became easier at the turn of the century, distance and time were no longer valid reasons for suggesting the idea of a new county. To appease the tireless work of the people from Northern Worcester County some concessions were made during the 19th Century. On June 6, 1856, an act was passed which declared that three terms of the Common Pleas Court should be held annually in Fitchburg and the town should be designated a half-shire.

Twenty-eight years later this legislation was advanced when the General Court decided Worcester County should be divided into two districts to serve Registry of Deeds clients only. One Registry office continued functioning in Worcester serving the majority of the county while the other office was established in Fitchburg. This second Registry served Leominster, Lunenburg, Westminster and Ashburnham, as well as Fitchburg. Harvey B. Wilder was allowed to retain his position as register of deeds for the Worcester District while the governor appointed a register to supervise the Fitchburg Registry. The appointment was temporary and in 1885 voters from the Northern District elected their own register of deeds. When Fitchburg was declared a half-shire, a courthouse was erected there and, when the Registry was created in 1884, it occupied part of the court building.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE WORCESTER REGISTRY IN ITS INFANCY

In its inception Worcester County numbered only 14 towns. While the county now contains 55 cities and towns, its boundaries have not swelled. The explanation is that many of the towns that later became part of the county grew out from the original 14 towns. Auburn, for example, was originally the South Parish of Worcester. State records indicate it was first acknowledged as a separate entity in 1837. Charlton was part of Oxford before gaining its own identity in 1754. Gardner was an outgrowth of parts of Ashburnham, Templeton, Westminster

and Winchendon. The latter was initially known as Ipswich Canada and later South Town, which in turn became Westminster.

Territorially, then, Worcester County has been altered little since its date of incorporation. But as settlements developed within the original 14 towns of Worcester County, newer ones were born and the older towns lost some of the stature they once commanded. Lancaster was once considered the most powerful development in the county, but by 1850 five other towns owed their origins either in whole or in part to Lancaster. They were: Leominster, Clinton, Bolton, Harvard and Berlin. Lancaster was now numbered among the smaller and less influential towns in the county.

The fact that counties throughout Massachusetts were experiencing the same evolutions as Worcester County pointed to a need for properly recording land ownership and transfers. The introduction to a book titled "Indian Deeds of Hampden County," clearly indicates this to be the case. "Noe person whatsoever shall buy any land of any Indean without leave from the court," the General Court declared in 1634 and in that year also insisted "that every town should keep a record book showing the ownership and transfer of all lands and should furnish the General Court with a transcript of the same."

The General Court subsequently decided that all land records should be made and kept by the county in which the land was located, rather than by the respective towns. It was through this series of declarations that registries of deeds were established in Massachusetts. The General Court should be given credit for its foresight. Its insistence that land records be kept was apparently a novel idea, as the mother country of England knew of no such system at that time. That land registrations should be made a permanent part of government was not a borrowed idea. One can only wonder what contemporary land purchases and transfers would be like if an office such as the Registry of Deeds was non-existent.

Land records for Worcester County were kept before the county itself was incorporated. Deeds for Worcester prior to 1731 were kept in Middlesex County. Deeds for Oxford, Sutton

and Uxbridge were kept in Suffolk County and deeds for towns in the western part of what is now Worcester County were recorded in Hampshire County.

When Worcester County was incorporated, it was determined by the Legislature that the freeholders of the county would elect a Register of Deeds and Conveyances on the first Thursday in September 1731. During the Colonial Period and until 1715 clerks of courts served simultaneously as registers of deeds. But on July 26, 1715, a law was adopted which said: "...in each county some person having a freehold within said county to the value of a least 10 pounds should be chosen by the people for the county register of deeds for the terms of five years..."

Clearly it was intended that landowners and those people who were in a special class should be eligible for public office. This is easily a violation of contemporary requisites and laws governing publicly elected officials. But in the beginning it was evident that men of distinction had definite advantages over common people in civic affairs. It is not coincidental then, that history's first registers of deeds were descendent from wealthy families.

Campaigning for public office today is difficult enough without monetary restrictions and or criteria attached. Fortunately, this was recognized long ago and office seekers are no longer required to attain a level of financial superiority before declaring their intentions for office. While the law adopted in 1715 clearly stated that registers of deeds should be elected every five years, it did not prohibit registers from seeking posts as clerks of courts or other county, municipal or state offices. Some of the county's earliest registers, in fact, served in several other elective offices simultaneously. John Chandler II and Timothy Paine were two such men. The law of 1715 was renewed in 1781 but in 1855 it was revamped and called for the election of Registers of Deeds every three years. Presently registers are elected to office every six years.

Even the earliest annual reports of the County Commissioners often failed to contain any mention of the work done by the Registry of Deeds. The most recent and detailed accounts begin with the year 1895 and offer only the skimpiest bits of information. The

Commissioners' report that year tells us that Registry receipts totaled \$1,802.00 and that expenditures were \$2,459.00. There is no indication how many instruments were recorded by that office, though the figure could not have been staggering as the office employed but a dozen people.

The salary of Register of Deeds Harvey B. Wilder was but \$500.00 that year, hardly an alarming figure. David Merriam, the register for the Northern District of Worcester County, was paid only \$300.00. T.S. Johnson, the county clerk of courts, received the almost unbelievable salary of \$5,000.00.

By 1896 salaries were on the rise. Wilder's pay improved to \$3,000.00. Even revenues at the Registry witnessed a sharp increase, jumping to \$10,253.00. Expenditures that year were \$10,607.00 and nearly all of it was devoted to salaries. At this time most non-salary expenses were attributable to stationery, books, binding services and similar items. It was unusual for these expenses to exceed \$1,000.00 per year.

The Registry evidenced little change during Wilder's last years in office. Receipts and expenditures remained constant, never rising or falling by more than a few hundred dollars each year. One staff addition worth noting before the turn of the century was that of Lizzie Barker as assistant register of deeds in 1897. It appears she may have been the first woman to assume a position of such elevation in the registry. Her annual salary, incidentally, was \$1,200.00.

There was one other event of note during Wilder's reign as register. During his last two years in office the registry moved into new quarters at the new Court House (which remains occupied today in Lincoln Square) along with the clerk of courts, the grand jury and the commissioners. Occupancy in a new building did nothing but boost the registry's visibility and image. Until the start of the 20th Century the Registry of Deeds was seldom considered an office that generated much enthusiasm among the civic activists of Worcester County. In many parts of the country, registries and Registers of Deeds are assumed by the county clerk of courts, whose duties are more varied. In some states the county clerk is considered one of the more powerful

and prestigious offices to be attained. It was not until 1901, when Daniel Kent became register of deeds, that the office acquired stature for the first time.

### THE REGISTRY UNDER DANIEL KENT

Progress was not achieved overnight when Kent became register, but it did not take long for him to transform it into a modern and efficient office. His first innovation was to replace the handwritten system of recording deeds with a typewritten system. This was done his first year as register and proved "...a great improvement and convenience to the public...", the commissioners reported. It was also a space-saver. In 1900, 33 volumes of records were placed on shelves in the Registry whereas only 24 were added over the next five years, this despite the fact the registry recorded 1000 more instruments in 1905 than in 1900.

An added bonus was the money saved from the typewritten method. During the first five-year period in which it was used, net savings were approximately \$1,800.00. Kent also adopted another innovative method of indexing and preserving records. The Emery Record Preserving Company's process of mounting plans was used and while recording fees imposed upon the public were increased to offset the costs of this service, Kent claimed the public felt "it was worth it". "It's a good way to preserve records", Kent insisted.

In 1905 he reported that the card plan index started the year before was complete and stored in new metal cases in the Record Hall at the Court House. The index contained all plans filed since 1731 and included the names of owners, abutters, surveyors, streets and local names. Also in 1905 the Registry observed a banner year. Its revenues were \$12,160.00 and it recorded 17,465 instruments. Both figures were Registry records. Throughout the decade business rose sharply at the Registry of Deeds, a trend that was indicative of the nation's economy.

Daniel Kent's report to the county commissioners in 1906, for example, attributed another gain in Registry receipts "to the healthy business conditions and the increase in the population of

the county". And two years later Kent was saying, "notwithstanding the business depression during the past year, work at the Registry has exceeded all past records".

By the end of the decade the Registry scaled new heights in receipts and documents recorded. More than 20,000 instruments were recorded — the first time in history such a figure was surpassed. Kent also reported it cost an average of 88 cents to index each record but the average receipt per instrument was 80 cents.

Kent also demonstrated a concern for preserving and protecting the records, which were passed into his office. In 1908 a fireproof record room, or vault, adjoining the Registry hall, was constructed and all old record cases were placed there. A large fireproof room was also constructed in the basement of the Court House to store all old indexes. The cards from which the consolidated indexes were made were also kept there. If the indexes in the Registry office should ever be destroyed, such precautionary measures would make it possible to reproduce new ones.

Just a year later Kent and his staff were devoting themselves to the task of re-indexing records from 1731 to 1840. "The present indexes are very incomplete and full of errors," he revealed. "Banks and private investors are insisting on more thorough examination of early titles. Private research of early records is also becoming more frequent," Kent disclosed. By 1911 the Worcester District Registry of Deeds had established itself as one of the most efficient in Massachusetts. "Various systems of handling instruments, indexing and keeping the records, which have been introduced by the present register, have become so complete that no new work in these lines was undertaken during the past year. The Worcester District Registry of Deeds is considered by those familiar with other Registries of Deeds as complete in its appointments and facilities for finding any record desired as any in the state," Kent wrote.

For the next several years, work proceeded satisfactorily. Receipts were constant at approximately \$20,000.00 per year. Soon the Registry was projecting itself a leader in returning recorded documents to the public. "Ordinarily, instruments are ready to be delivered in from 10 to

14 days from their receipt. No other registry in the state doing as large a business delivers its papers as promptly," Kent announced. The year 1916 saw the Registry once again reach all-time highs in revenues and recorded instruments. More than \$23,000.00 was received during the year while more than 28,000 instruments were handled. But the First World War did not pass without creating an impact on property transactions. While 1917 reported an increase in deed recordings, mortgages were down substantially. Both Kent and David Merriam, the Northern District register, spoke about the war's effect on local real estate business. Said Kent: "This shows that the general falling off of business was owing to the peculiar financial conditions which we experienced during the past nine months. It is safe to assume if banks had continued to loan money on real estate, there would have been a fair amount of activity in new development and building." Merriam's remarks were more direct.

"It has often been said that real estate is the last thing to feel any unusual or extraordinary condition in the business world or the money market; doubtless this accounts for the fact that the war seems to have had no appreciable effect on the Registry business until the last few months," he commented. There was noticeable impact on Registry business in 1917 and again in 1918. Receipts dropped \$3,000.00 the first year and by another \$3,000.00 the second year. Such sums might today be passed off without the slightest concern, but these declines represented a loss of roughly 25 percent in revenues in only a two-year period. The Registry had never witnessed such drastic declines.

"The reason for the falling off can be easily explained," Kent said. "Savings banks have made no new loans and government restrictions on new buildings, together with the high cost of materials, tended to decrease the number of transactions in real estate," he reasoned. By 1919 the "war to end all wars" was over and the country was back on its feet again. For the first time in history receipts surpassed \$30,000.00, an increase of about 75 percent over the previous year. Instruments recorded totaled 37,543, also a new high and jump of almost 75 percent over 1918's figures.

Prosperity abounded and it was reflected in the salaries granted county employees. Kent received a raise to \$5,044.00, a very handsome wage for that period. So great was his pay that more than 20 years later the register of deeds was earning only a few hundred dollars per year more. The register's salary was also brought into line with what the clerk of courts was earning. T.S. Johnson's salary was now \$5,600.00, or \$400.00 more than it was a quarter of a century earlier. Government was suddenly discovering that registries of deeds across the state were vital offices.

Prosperity continued to be the prominent word in the Worcester Registry of Deeds. Receipts soared to beyond \$44,000.00 and the number of instruments recorded was beyond 38,000. (An increase in fees assessed the public for recordings accounted in large part for the tremendous increase in receipts).

Work in the Registry was just beginning to peak, but Kent was approaching retirement and within ten years the nation's economy, coupled with high unemployment figures, would become everyone's chief concern.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PROSPERITY -- THEN THE DEPRESSION

The years 1921-1930 were highlighted by two events: Daniel Kent's retirement after more than two decades of service, and a severe decline in business resultant, no doubt, from the Stock Market crash in 1929 and the general unsteadiness of the economy. After serving admirably as register for 22 years, Kent announced his retirement at the end of 1922. About to celebrate his 70th birthday but a day after New Year's Day, the commissioners dutifully recorded Kent's achievements. "He found the Registry a small department...he leaves it a large department," they acknowledged. In his last summary report for the county, Kent wrote: "At that time (when he took over the Registry) the Registry was considered by those familiar with public records as one of the poorest in the state. The indexes were a nightmare to examiners and an endless labyrinth to the

public. Work was in a dilapidated condition with no adequate system for carrying it on... I am leaving records which give the number of instruments received and copied daily during my 22 years; the names of the clerks who copied and compared each instrument during that time; a list of all employees, giving a monthly and yearly account of the work each did and the wages they were paid; and daily, monthly and yearly receipts."

The commissioners' final tribute to Kent went accordingly: "During his long term of 22 years of public service, he has not only kept pace with the constantly increasing volume of business but has introduced the typewritten records, the description indexes and has put the office generally on a high plane of efficiency and made it one of the best Registries in the Commonwealth. He has written books on the science of indexing and has become a recognized authority on that subject."

To say that Kent advanced the Registry to previously unattained levels of efficiency would not be overstating the case. His successor, then, had the good fortune of inheriting an office that was a source of pride to the entire county. And Chester S. Bavis did nothing to discredit the Registry's reputation when he took over. The transition appears to have been a smooth one. Registry revenues topped \$50,000.00 for the first time in 1923 and with three years rose to \$62,000.00, a figure that would not be attained again for many years. That the Registry had become one of the more dynamic offices in Worcester County was more fully realized when Bavis's salary was elevated to \$6,500.00 in 1925. This made him the highest paid official in county government

Amid the euphoria, curious indicators were surfacing. If you recall Merriam's remarks in 1917, when he said "real estate is the last...to feel any unusual...condition in the business world..." it would seem that ominous signs were presenting themselves through Registry statistics. To have predicted the Stock Market Crash of 1929, based solely upon evidence contained in local real estate figures, might have been too great a declaration to make. But indicators pointed to a dramatic sloughing off period for the immediate future.

In 1926, Bavis's fourth full year in office, receipts were down by almost \$7,000.00. During the war years revenues tailed off by \$6,000.00 during a two-year run but business rebounded when the war ended. It was conceivable then, that 1926's losses might be made up within a short time span. However, this time the bad news lingered. During a five-year period revenues had fallen by \$21,000.00, for an approximate 33 percent drop. The number of instruments recorded dropped from a high of 42,000 in 1925 to a low of 29,757 at the end of the decade. When the Thirties rolled around, they did so inauspiciously. The severe dollar cutbacks of the Twenties were curtailed in 1930, but instrument recordings also dwindled, finally skidding to 21,246 in 1932. Not since 1910 had the Registry handled such a low volume of documents.

Historians may well recall the uneasiness of times. The Roaring Twenties were followed by the Stock Market collapse, which was the forerunner of the Depression. And even when Franklin Roosevelt occupied the White House for the first time in 1932, 13 million Americans were standing in the unemployment lines across the nation. But the Thirties never have and never will be referred to as a progressive era. The nation struggled through a period of great consternation, with jobs the prime worry at home and threats of war the chief topic of conversation abroad. This was not a decade then, which lent itself to expansion or games of chance. Real estate suffered through a lean period. In 1931 Registry receipts were \$46,736 and the number of instruments recorded was 24,998. By 1939 receipts had increased by only \$4,000.00 and the Registry recorded just 1000 instruments more than it did nine years earlier. In between there was little deviation from these figures.

Under Bavis, innovation was an apparently unknown commodity. The recording systems instituted by Kent were functioning smoothly and Bavis seemed content not to tamper with a successful system. Save for a few minor alterations to the Registry office (add a few tables here, transfer a few shelves there, add some lights) there was little change to report. Significant personnel changes occurred in 1938. Assistant Registers Lottie Hubbard and Esther Moore retired and were replaced by E. Edwin Olund and Ralph Kendall. On Nov. 24, 1939, Chester Bavis died

after serving 17 years as Register of Deeds in the Worcester office. Olund became interim register while Kendall retained his position as second assistant. Norman French occupied the assistant register's chair. As a final tribute to Bavis, Olund wrote: "Endowed with patience and kindly understanding, he had endeared himself to all during his years of public service."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE START OF A NEW ERA

One of the longest tenures in Registry history began in 1940 with the election of Robert R. Gallagher. He would go on to serve through all or parts of four decades before passing away in 1972. Named to his staff were John F. Mullan, Jr. and Edward Gariepy as assistant and second assistant respectively. During Gallagher's first full year in office he was able to effectuate improvement in the return time of real estate documents deposited for recording at the Registry. A quarter of a century earlier Daniel Kent guaranteed return of deeds within 10 to 14 days. But somewhere along the way (Gallagher did not attribute the blame in lengthy return time either to Bavis or Olund) there was a retardation in the process and people were now receiving documents five to six weeks after they had been brought to the Court House. The new return time did not equal Kent's but Gallagher was able to reduce it to approximately three weeks. This was accomplished, Gallagher explained, by coordinating the work of the various departments.

The improved office efficiency was critically important since the real estate market showed significant advancement. Receipts at the Registry surpassed \$54,000.00 in both 1940 and 1941, the first time they had reached such levels in 15 years. History intervened again to dampen the progress noted in local land transactions. By 1942 the U.S. had involved itself totally in the war in Europe and the Pacific. Gallagher himself accepted a commission as lieutenant in the Naval Reserve and left the Registry for active duty. In his absence, Mullan ran the office. Despite the domination of day-to-day living by the war, Registry records showed evidence that Americans at home could still devote some attention to the real estate market.

Mullan's report in 1943 read as follows: "The year marked by a healthy real estate market, particularly in the field of medium-priced single homes. "The lack of building, due to wartime material shortages, and rent control restrictions, did not have the drastic effect on the market many had predicted. They did serve, however, to limit speculation in multi-family dwellings and curb inflationary price rises." Interest remained moderate in single-family dwellings, however; and the annual rates of receipt and instrument recordings during the war years were \$48,000.00 and 26,000 respectively. When the war did end and a return to normalcy prevailed in 1946, Registry statistics reflected the nation's optimism in its future.

Revenues, assisted by a boost in recording fees, soared to \$85,505.00 and the number of instruments recorded surpassed 40,000 in 1946. A year later the latter figure declined slightly but receipts rose to \$105,000.00. Expansion became a prominent word as the number of rooms needed to accommodate Registry customers, as well as the materials contained within it, was enlarged.

There was one somber note in an otherwise profitable year. Assistant Register John F. Mullan, Jr. died in April. In 1948 Gallagher introduced two new systems to the Registry: Microfilming of all old record books and a reporting service for the assessors of several municipalities in the Worcester Registry district. The latter service produced photostatic copies of land transfers from 1948 in the City of Worcester and the towns of Blackstone, Brookfield, North Brookfield, Phillipston, Sutton and Warren. The copies were submitted to the boards of assessors of these towns.

When the decade ended with Registry revenues surpassing \$100,000.00 for a third consecutive year, it became evident that the office and the duty of recording land transactions was about to embark on a new era, one which would be devoid of crises and setbacks. A second assistant register passed away during Gallagher's reign. Phoebe Rocheleau, appointed to replace John F. Mullan, Jr. in 1947, died January 29, 1950, She was replaced by Richard Sheridan who would continue to serve in that capacity, and briefly as interim register, until 1972.

Microfilming became an integral function in the Registry during the Fifties. In 1950 a new photostat-microfilm department was constructed and three years later "the job of microfilming all old registered land certificates was complete. The Registry then set out to microfilm all bankruptcy indexes.

For a brief period in 1952 the Registry office was moved to the rear of the Court House while extensive repairs were rendered to the Registry of Deeds. While monies accrued by the Registry escalated annually, the office did not always show a profit. For example, in 1956 the Registry totaled \$184,000.00 in revenues, but the labor intensive budget absorbed over 90 percent of the total expenditures of \$205,000.00. From 1960 through 1969 the Registry functioned on the merits of earlier innovations. When Daniel Kent's pious devotion to detail, to establishing an indexing system that was superior to all others in the Commonwealth, to setting precedents for preserving old records was combined with Robert Gallagher's implementation of microfilm systems and his own devotion to duty, the office settled into a comfortable period. Workers were hardly idle, though, as receipts mounted annually, rising from \$216,000.00 in 1960 to nearly \$300,000.00 by 1969.

What was unusual about this decade is that the war in Southeast Asia seems to have had no negative impact on the real estate market in this country. To be sure, Americans were satisfied with their belief that United States involvement in the conflict would be short-lived and since this struggle was taking place in such a remote location, why should risk become a factor in local real estate exchanges? This point is raised largely to note a shift in attitudes that developed throughout the years.

The real estate market as reflected in Registry of Deeds statistics often served as a barometer for social habits. Throughout some of the more significant moments in history, the real estate business suffered through periods of decline. During World War I, during the Stock Market Crash and the Depression, and during World War II, real estate gains were curtailed as even money matters took a back seat to war and unemployment. But throughout the conflict in

Viet Nam the business of buying and selling homes in Worcester County remained steady. In 1965, when the national role in the war escalated, Registry revenues likewise grew to \$313,000.00, the greatest in the history of the office. There were subsequent declines throughout the rest of the decade but they failed to exceed five percent.

In 1968 Daniel Callahan, who was appointed assistant register in 1965, died while still engaged in the duties of that position. He was the third assistant to pass away while serving under Gallagher. By early 1972 the workload began to exceed staff capabilities. The Registry standard of quick return time of deeds and other documents was now a difficult one to uphold. Staff shortages were responsible in part for the backlog of unrecorded data. The Registry was also without computers that could relieve the problem. Then, on April 22, 1972, Robert Gallagher passed away and problems multiplied.

It seemed ironic that such conditions should emerge at the end of what was otherwise a solid tenure. As register in 1941 Gallagher inherited a job which demanded he reduce the lengthy return time that was characteristic for recorded instruments during the previous regime. That problem was alleviated within his first years in office, and never surfaced again until the end of his career.

A letter from Gallagher to the county commissioners written two months before his passing explained "several department heads were either ill or had resigned, new personnel was not yet familiar with the operations to make creditable contributions, and this all combined to create a tremendous backlog of work."

After Richard Sheridan assumed the post of interim register, he further pointed out that no new staff additions had been made since 1953 (a period of 19 years) and that more personnel was desperately needed to rectify the backlog problem. He indicated that more than 13,000 documents had not yet been processed that year and even with strict attention to this chore for an entire month, 13,000 instruments still remained unprocessed. These conditions prevailed when Anthony J. Vigliotti was elected register of deeds in the autumn of 1972.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE REGISTRY ENTERS THE COMPUTER AGE

Personnel adjustments contributed to the multitude of records awaiting Registry attention in early 1972 but so too did the high volume of instruments brought to the Court House. More than 55,000 documents were received that year, a total that was remarkable then, although that total is less than 20 percent of current recordings. Receipts also approached a half-million dollars, which lent further to a business boom.

During the 1973-74 fiscal year (the County adopted an 18-month budget to conform with the federal government's fiscal year) John Shea Esq., former mayor of Worcester, retired from his position as assistant register in 1973. At this time Register Vigliotti added two new assistant registers, first assistant John J. Mitchell, former chief counsel of the Massachusetts Public Defenders in Worcester, and P. Stephen Turo, the second assistant. Mr. Vigliotti soon initiated steps to more effectively deal with high volumes of work. At the Register's request, the employees donated a weekend of work, which completely changed the hand-written and typed index card system. The Register then lead the Worcester Registry into the computer age with an automated system of indexing, which made information available to the public in a more convenient and more expeditious manner with less individual work for Registry employees. With less tedious work for the employees, they were able to perform more tasks in less time and the Registry advanced rapidly as to process repeated itself. Vigliotti also established an in house computer indexing system, which allowed a daily printed index of records.

A compact book system was also initiated which reduced the size and weight of the record books without sacrificing any space. The return time for recorded documents was reduced to seven days for several months, remarkable for the time, although it is now down to three to five days. During the 1974-75 fiscal year Vigliotti instituted a new system of banking monies collected from instrument fees. Whereas in the past all monies were deposited in non-interest bearing checking accounts, dollars were now deposited in a savings account, making it possible

for the Registry to return thousands of dollars in interest to the county treasurer on an annual basis.

In 1977 the Registry of Deeds received three contract awards totaling \$242,000.00. The grants were made through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and made it possible for the Registry to add 45 employees to the staff as no expense to the county. These additional people assisted in efforts to preserve and restore old and valuable Registry records.

The office has continued functioning as a most vital part of government. As the decade neared an end the Registry recorded approximately 60,000 documents with revenues of more than \$500,000.00 going to the county and \$800,000.00 more being directed to the State via excise fees. The Registry was ready for the real estate boom of the 1980's with its advanced computer system, but every employee was strained to the limit, nevertheless. In 1980, the Registry recorded 53,436 documents. In 1985, 109,044 documents were recorded. In 1986, 154,723 were recorded and in 1987, 147,256 was the total. 1988 seemed like a quiet year when only 125,124 documents were recorded. Without the foresight and planning of Register Vigliotti, there would have been chaos in land records and the Worcester Registry would have suffered the loss of respects and confidence that befell other Registries of Deeds. Despite this success, the 1980s were also a sad time for the Registry of Deeds, second assistant register Paul Mullan passed away. His replacement Stanley Kachinowicz later would pass on as well. The position would remain unoccupied for many years.

The Registry first used computer technology in 1974. In 1976 the Worcester Registry in partnership with IBM developed an advanced computerized indexing system. In 1989 Wang Computers were installed and an improved system was installed that utilized Wang's Optical Scanning System for document imaging which permits the user to call up a picture of the document on the computer screen. Prior to this the recorded data was available but the person had to go to bound volumes to see a copy of the document. The public benefits from these systems because they and users of the Registry

records have access to more information and the information conveniently and quickly located. This results in substantial cost savings and reduced time. The Registry offered a Land Track system, which permitted off site access to the Registry records. More than 150 subscribers (attorneys, realtors, bankers, etc.) used this system and produced substantial additional revenues for the taxpayers of Worcester County.

In 1998, County Government was abolished and the Worcester District Registry of Deeds became an office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Joseph McGuire Esq., former Judge of the Industrial Accident Board, was named second assistant register, a position that he held until his retirement in 2003. On June 2, 2003, the registry began using a new computer system designed by ACS Inc. The system electronically records the documents, provides computerized indices, and provides an online search of documents dating back to 1965 that can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. With this new system, the registry no longer has any need to produce paper books. In the future, documents may be recorded online, making the recording process even more user friendly.

## CHAPTER NINE

### WHAT IS THE REGISTRY OF DEEDS?

The Worcester District Registry of Deeds is the largest Registry district in Massachusetts. With jurisdiction over 55 cities and towns it is larger than the entire County of Middlesex, which numbers 54 cities and towns within its two districts. The Worcester Registry has obviously come a long way since the 18th Century when officials from Middlesex and Hampden Counties argued heavily against the creation of a new county in Central Massachusetts.

In its earliest days the Registry operated on a budget of only hundreds of dollars. Annual revenues also fell into this range. A dozen employees or less managed the office during this era.

Today, 40 people are employed at the Registry, which also operates on a budget of approximately 2 million dollars, but which also generates 35 to 51 million dollars for the commonwealth. When incorporated in 1731 Worcester County numbered 14 towns. Today, the 55 cities and towns contained within the Worcester District are as follows:

ATHOL  
AUBURN  
BARRE  
BERLIN  
BLACKSTONE  
BOLTON  
BOYLSTON  
BROOKFIELD  
CHARLTON  
CLINTON  
DOUGLAS  
DUDLEY  
EAST BROOKFIELD  
GARDNER  
GRAFTON  
HARDWICK  
HARVARD  
HOLDEN

HOPEDALE  
HUBBARDSTON  
LANCASTER  
LEICESTER  
MENDON  
MILFORD  
MILLBURY  
MILLVILLE  
NEW BRAINTREE  
NORTHBOROUGH  
NORTHBRIDGE  
NORTH BROOKFIELD  
OAKHAM  
OXFORD  
PAXTON  
PETERSHAM  
PHILLIPSTON  
PRINCETON

ROYALSTON  
RUTLAND  
SHREWSBURY  
SOUTHBOROUGH  
SOUTHBRIDGE  
SPENCER  
STERLING  
STURBRIDGE  
SUTTON  
TEMPLETON  
UPTON  
UXBRIDGE  
WARREN  
WEBSTER  
WESTBOROUGH  
WEST BOYLSTON  
WEST BROOKFIELD  
WINCHENDON  
WORCESTER

The most vital service the Registry performs, of course, is as keeper of land ownership and real estate transactions. It is also an important source of information for anyone wishing to document the history of ownership of a parcel of property. The Registry of Deeds also permits Boards of Assessors throughout its district to determine current municipal records of ownership.

Records at the Registry of Deeds have been arranged systematically for the convenience of its patrons as well as for its own use. Three indexes enable the public and Registry employees to locate information with ease. The Plan Index located in the Registry's main office contains an alphabetical listing of plan owners, plan names, location, and surveyors' names. These are kept in electronic indices and electronic book form. Computerized indices refer to the plan book and page where a copy of the plan can be found. Also original plans are retained at the Registry within the computer database, paper copies, and microfilm copies, which are available to the public.

Land records are also maintained in index form at the Registry. The index to these records allows patrons to locate information on those who convey property (grantors) and those who receive property (grantees). As with plan records, indices in alphabetical form offer direction to land record books and the pages where specific documents can be found. Record books are found adjacent to the index in the upper and lower vaults and in electronic format within the Registry database. And finally, paper and electronic indices in the Land Court department contain alphabetical listings of all present owners of registered land within the district. The indices contain certificate numbers, which make reference to owners' certificates, which are located in books and within the Registry's computerized database. The Registry has clearly come a long way since the earliest days of Worcester County government, when, despite good intentions, records were not always kept with the convenience of the public in mind. All Registry of Deeds books, documents, plans, and other recorded information are microfilmed, scanned, and stored in redundant databases and secured at offsite locations.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE REGISTERS OF DEEDS

As mentioned earlier, in many counties across the United States there is no elected official known as register of deeds. The duties of such a figure are assumed by clerks of courts. In the earliest days of state government a similar situation existed in Massachusetts. But when Worcester County was incorporated in 1731 it was specifically stated that a Registry of Deeds should be established. There was no statute prohibiting clerks of courts, or any other office holder, from seeking the job of register of deeds. In fact, the county's first register of deeds held no less than seven titles simultaneously.

#### JOHN CHANDLER II (1731-

1760)

John Chandler II was the first person elected register of deeds by the voters of Worcester County. His was one of the more powerful and prestigious families living in the county in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Though he did not settle in Worcester until the year he was elected register (1731), he became totally immersed in local politics.

Charles A. Chase, who served as county treasurer more than a century later, wrote of Chandler: "He was so closely associated with the affairs of the town and county for 31 years until his death that, to distinguish him from his father and son, I style hime 'Worcester John'".

Chandler is recognized as an early authority on county government and its principles. For 23 years he was clerk of courts, he was a judge for eight years, sheriff for 11 years, county treasurer for 26 years, register of deeds and probate for 30 years, and judge of probate for six years. Though it seems unlikely he might have had time for anything else, Chandler could not

divorce himself from municipal matters either. He served on the board of selectmen and as town treasurer from 1741 to 1752, and was almost always town moderator at annual meetings, and for several years served as a representative to the General Court. From all accounts it appears Chandler was capable in each and every endeavor. When he died August 7, 1762, he still retained his positions as sheriff, judge and probate judge.

#### TIMOTHY PAINE (1761-1774)

Timothy Paine succeeded his stepfather, John Chandler II, as register of deeds in 1761 and served in that capacity until 1775. Though he was not as involved in government matters as his stepfather, Paine was also possessor of more than one title.

For ten years (1757-1767) he was register of probate and also served as selectman and representative to the General Court. There was one title, however, which caused Paine some anguish. As a councilor to His Majesty in England from 1763 to 1768, the colonists took opposition to his "stout loyalty to the King." Documents at the Worcester Historical Society indicate that sufficient pressure was exerted against Paine in 1774 causing him to relinquish his position as councilor. The accounts state that 3000 citizens of Worcester County arrived in Worcester before 7 a.m. on August 23 to demand Paine's resignation as councilor. Despite his loyalties to the king at this time, Paine was later forgiven and ran for the U.S. Congress endorsed by that "stout old rebel" Isaiah Thomas.

Paine was a graduate of Harvard in 1748 and ranked fifth in his class. He married his stepsister, Sarah Chandler, and was one of the largest real estate owners in Worcester by 1767, when he became holder of a large tract of land on what is now known as Lincoln Street. Paine died in 1793 at the age of 63.

### NATHAN BALDWIN (1775-1783)

Nathan Baldwin was first elected register of deeds in 1775 and he served for a total of nine years. However, Baldwin is probably best remembered as a spokesman for local patriots during their battle with England. Baldwin, it seems, was never lacking in courage when it came time to speak out against the crown and in defense of civil liberties.

Born in 1720, Baldwin served as a selectman in Worcester in 1770 and as town clerk from 1775-1778. He earned a reputation as a forcible writer who kept company with many of the patriots of the day. He was assigned the duty of writing to the Massachusetts General Court during the Revolution to note protests by residents against actions of the crown. He was also a founder of the Political Society, a secret association of prominent men in Worcester during the Revolution who banded in opposition to the policies of the king in England.

As an example of his many communications to the Legislature, Baldwin wrote at one point asking the General Court to "use your influence to obtain a law to put an end to that unchristian and impolitic practice of making slaves of the human species in this province." Baldwin was married twice and had five children.

### DANIEL CLAPP (1784-1816)

Daniel Clapp was register of deeds in the Worcester District for 32 years, which surpasses Robert Gallagher's reign as longest in the history of the office. Born October 10, 1739, he was the son of John and Abigail (Estabrook) Clapp. His early years were spent in Rutland and he served as a representative from that town to the First Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774. Clapp also held the rank of colonel in the military. While living in Boston in 1757 he became a member of the singing choir connected with the religious Society of Church Green. Information extracted from "the Clapp Family in America" suggests that

Daniel Clapp "was probably married but had no children." During the latter part of his life Clapp resided in Worcester where he died in 1827. He was register of deeds from 1784 to 1816, when he stepped down at the age of 77. His long stint as Register of Deeds is surpassed in Worcester County History only by Anthony J. Vigliotti.

#### OLIVER FISKE (1816-1820)

Oliver Fiske was register of deeds for but a mere five years but he was one of the most distinguished men ever to hold the office.

Son of the Rev. Nathan Fiske of Brookfield, he was born there in 1762.

He enlisted in the American Army during the Revolution when he was but 18 years old. Upon leaving the military, Fiske studied medicine and played a prominent role in the formation of the County Medical Society just prior to the end of the 18th Century. He was even named its president.

It was not until 1824 that he obtained an MD from Harvard. In between Fiske used his prominence as a Federalist, as well as his skills as a public speaker, to boost his stature in local politics. In 1798 he was elected treasurer for the Town of Worcester and two years later he became town clerk. In 1803 he was also appointed a special justice of the Court of Common Pleas. From 1813-1815 he served as a member of the Executive Council and from 1816-1821 he held the office of register of deeds.

In addition to his involvement in the occupations already mentioned, Fiske was also a member of the American Academy of Arts of Sciences, an associate justice of the General Court of Sessions in 1807, and a corporator of the Worcester County Institution for Savings. The bank opened in 1824 and was the first savings bank chartered in Worcester County and the first in Massachusetts outside of Boston. Deafness caused Fiske to retire from an active role in politics in

1822 and most of his last 15 years were devoted to agriculture. Fiske died in Boston on January 25, 1837.

#### ARTEMAS WARD (1821-1845)

Artemas Ward was register of deeds for a quarter of a century, from 1821 to 1846. Though he was a descendant of William Ward of Sudbury, and a relative of General Artemas Ward, a local Colonial military hero and a respected county official, Ward's own lifestyle seems to have been devoid of notoriety. Born May 18, 1776 in Worcester, he was married first to Betsy Phillips of Milford in 1798 and, following her death, to Mary Anne Barber of Worcester in 1816. He had 13 children from both marriages. Ward died November 11, 1850, at the age of 74.

#### ALEXANDER H. WILDER (1846-1873)

Alexander H. Wilder became register of deeds following the retirement of Artemas Ward in 1846. Born July 20, 1804 in Lancaster to a family well-known in that town and throughout the county, Wilder devoted his entire career to the Registry of Deeds. Upon his arrival in Worcester in 1823 he immediately went to work under the supervision of Ward. The following year he was stricken with rheumatic fever, which left him crippled for life but did not keep him from fulfilling his duties in the Registry.

For 23 years Wilder served as a clerk and assistant to Artemas Ward. He succeeded Ward as register and continued to win re-election until his death on December 12, 1874. His full association with the Registry of Deeds spanned 51 years, a true mark of dedication. The Spy, a Worcester newspaper of the day, said upon his death: "Probably no one who habitually transacts business with that office can remember the time when Mr. Wilder was not employed in it and the experience of very few goes back to the time of the register who preceded him." The Spy also labeled him "a model official."

### HARVEY B. WILDER (1873-1875) & (1877-1900)

Harvey B. Wilder, born October 12, 1836, was the son of Alexander Wilder and was appointed by the county commissioners to fill the unexpired term of his father. In 1856, at the age of 20, he became the chief clerk in the Registry. Like his father, he devoted himself at an early age, and for much of his life, to the Registry of Deeds. He resigned the position in 1875 but ran for election in 1876 and was victorious. His entire stint as register equaled that of his father's.

### CHARLES A. CHASE (1876)

Charles Augustus Chase was the man who interrupted the 54-year reign of the Wilders as registers of deeds. He held the position for but one year, between the time Harvey Wilder resigned and then won election outright for the first time. Chase is most remembered for his service as county treasurer. He held that position from 1865-1876. But Chase was also highly opinionated politically and failed to enjoy the popular support of any parties during his time. When he retired from politics in 1876 this no doubt had some bearing on it, although his greatest love ultimately seems to have been in social affairs.

A graduate of Harvard, where he ranked 17th in his class, Chase was very active in societies, convivial clubs and organizations in Worcester. He helped promote the Worcester Lyceum and its lecture courses and even entertained many of the lecturers who came to Worcester. Chase was also extremely interested in journalism. He lived for a time in Boston and worked on the staff of the Boston Daily Advertiser. In later years he became part owner of the Worcester Evening Gazette. Chase died in 1911 at the age of 78.

### DANIEL KENT (1901-1922)

Daniel Kent was elected register of deeds in 1900 and is remembered as an innovator and expert on land records and indexing systems. Born January 2, 1853, Kent graduated from Amherst College and rose immediately to the top of the local business world. In 1881 he was instrumental in the establishment of the Lakeside Manufacturing Co. in Leicester, which produced woolen materials. In a short time he became president of the company. While a resident of Leicester he was chairman of the board of selectmen, chairman of the trustees of the public library, chairman of the Park Committee, secretary of the School Committee, and town moderator.

He was also a member of the Republican State Committee from the Third Senatorial District from 1892-1895, and served as secretary of the Republican State Committee and the state conventions in 1894 and 1895. In 1903 his book, "Land Records, a System of Indexing," was published. It is considered the first work ever written on that intricate subject. He is also recognized for establishing the Worcester District Registry of Deeds as one of the most efficient and professional in Massachusetts.

#### CHESTER S. BAVIS (1923-1939)

Chester Swan Bavis, a native of Calais, Maine, and a graduate of schools in that state, occupied the office of register of deeds for nearly two full decades before passing away on November 24, 1939, at the age of 57. He was the last of a long line of Republicans, Federalists and Loyalists elected to the post by the voters of Worcester County. Born in Maine in 1882, Bavis graduated from Bowdoin College in 1906 and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1910.

His first professional job after graduation from Bowdoin was as a ticket agent for the Metropolitan Steamship Co. in New York. Before long he made his way to Worcester and in

1912 he obtained a position in the office of the clerk of courts. He held that job until 1916 when he became assistant clerk of the Superior Court. In 1922, following Daniel Kent's retirement, Bavis was elected to the first of three six-year terms as register of deeds. During his tenure as register Bavis also authored two books: "The Making of a Citizen" and "Key to the Federal Income and Excess Profits Taxes."

The first book was a series of questions and answers dealing with the law and process of naturalization. Bavis was also director of the Independent Co-Operative Bank in Worcester for several years. He was married to Mertle Ball and had four daughters.

#### E. EDWIN OLUND (1939-1940)

E. Edwin Olund was named assistant register in 1938 and, upon Bavis 's death in November, 1939, he was named interim register, a position he maintained until the election of 1940.

#### ROBERT R. GALLAGHER (1941-1972)

Robert R. Gallagher had served Worcester County and its patrons for more than 30 years when he succumbed to a heart attack on April 22, 1972, at the age of 68. When he was elected register of deeds for the first of six six-year terms in 1940, Gallagher became the first Democrat ever voted into that office. Six years earlier he became the first Democrat ever to seek that office. However, he lost a closely contested race to Chester Bavis by a mere 3000 votes. More than 135,000 ballots were cast in that election.

A graduate of Holy Cross College in 1927 and Boston University Law School in 1930, he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1930. In 1938 Gov. Charles Hurley appointed him a public administrator and he served in that capacity until his election to the Registry of Deeds two years later. During World War II he served in the Pacific for 34 months and when the war ended he left

the service with the rank of lieutenant. In 1949 he was elected president of the Massachusetts Registers of Deeds Association, a position he held for several other terms.

Mr. Gallagher is credited with having modernized the office and its land recording systems. The use of microfilm to record all indices, past and present, was introduced as work demands reached and maintained a steady level for more than 30 years. Beginning with the end of World War II the Registry annually recorded better than 40,000 instruments, often exceeding 50,000.

#### RICHARD F. SHERIDAN (1972)

Richard F. Sheridan served as interim register following Robert Gallagher's death and until a special election was held in the autumn of 1972, at which time Anthony J. Vigliotti was elected. A resident of Blackstone, Sheridan was appointed second assistant register of deeds in 1953 after serving previously as a principal clerk in the Worcester District Registry of Deeds. He was first employed at the Court House in 1941.

#### ANTHONY J. VIGLIOTTI (1972-present)

Anthony J. Vigliotti, born November 5, 1942, and a native of Worcester, was elected Register of Deeds in a special election held nearly seven months after Mr. Gallagher's death in 1972. He was re-elected by a near two-to-one margin in 1976 and currently is serving in his sixth term. Former president of the Massachusetts Register of Deeds Association, and former vice-president of the Massachusetts Association of County Officials, he has been active in Worcester civic affairs. Currently, Mr. Vigliotti serves on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Clerks, Recorders, and County Officials and chairs its Land Records Committee. In 1980 he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention and was a regional coordinator for the Carter for President Committee in 1976. In September 1978 he was a candidate for the Democratic

nomination for secretary of state in Massachusetts. He is a former president of the Worcester County Bar Association and currently serves as its Secretary Treasurer.

During Register Vigliotti's term the following improvements were made to modernize the Worcester District Registry of Deeds:

Reduction of document return time from seven months to between 3 to 5 working days;

Elimination of plan books and the electronic scanning of plans into a computer database;

Offsite security storage of registry books, plans, documents, and computerized information;

Institution of interest bearing checking accounts under county government;

Public access to registry information via computer terminals and the Internet;

In-house creation of electronic record and plan books;

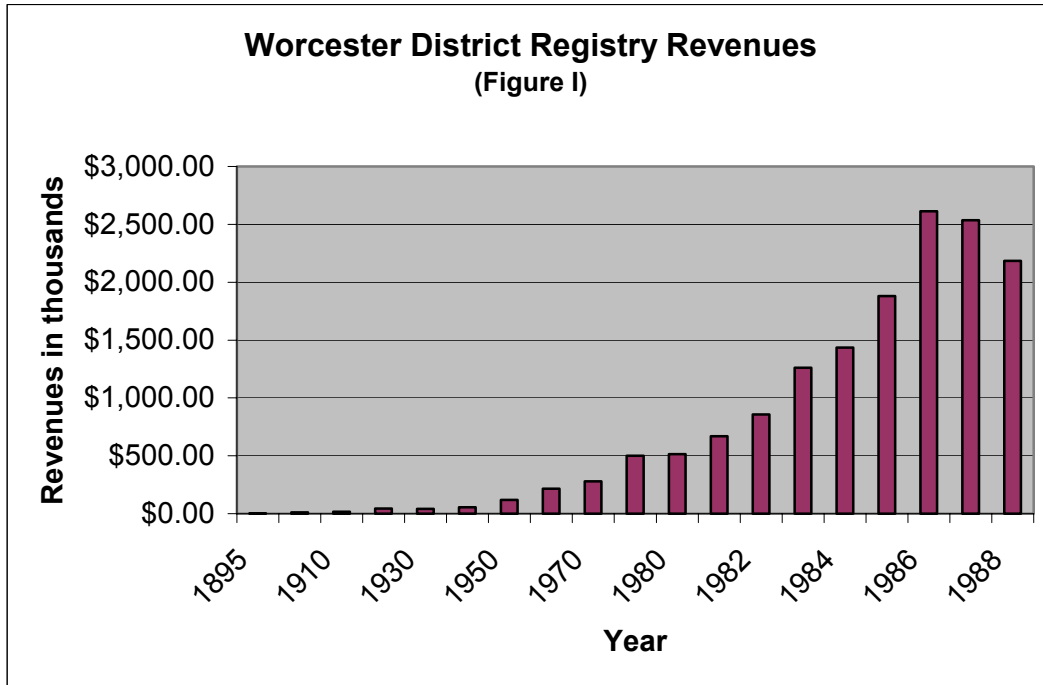
Publication of Consumer Information Booklets;

Guide to Worcester District Registry of Deeds;

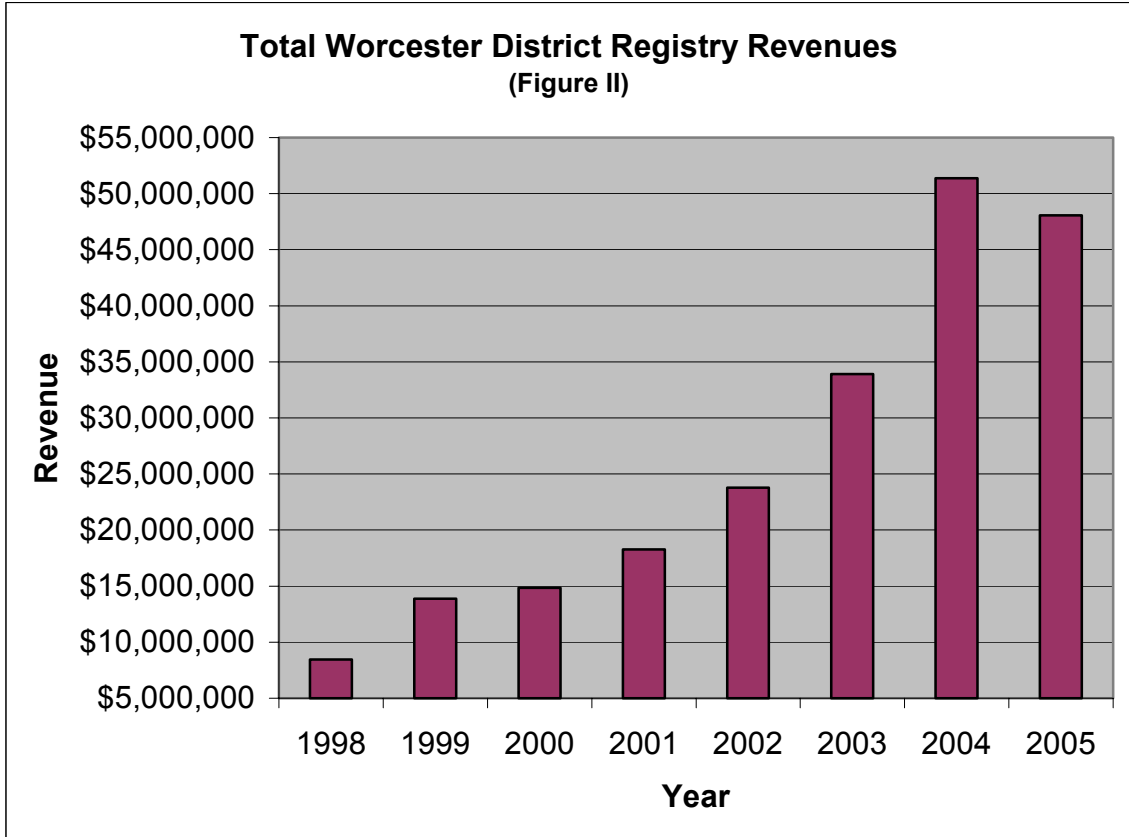
Twenty most asked questions about the Registry of Deeds;

History of the Worcester Registry of Deeds.

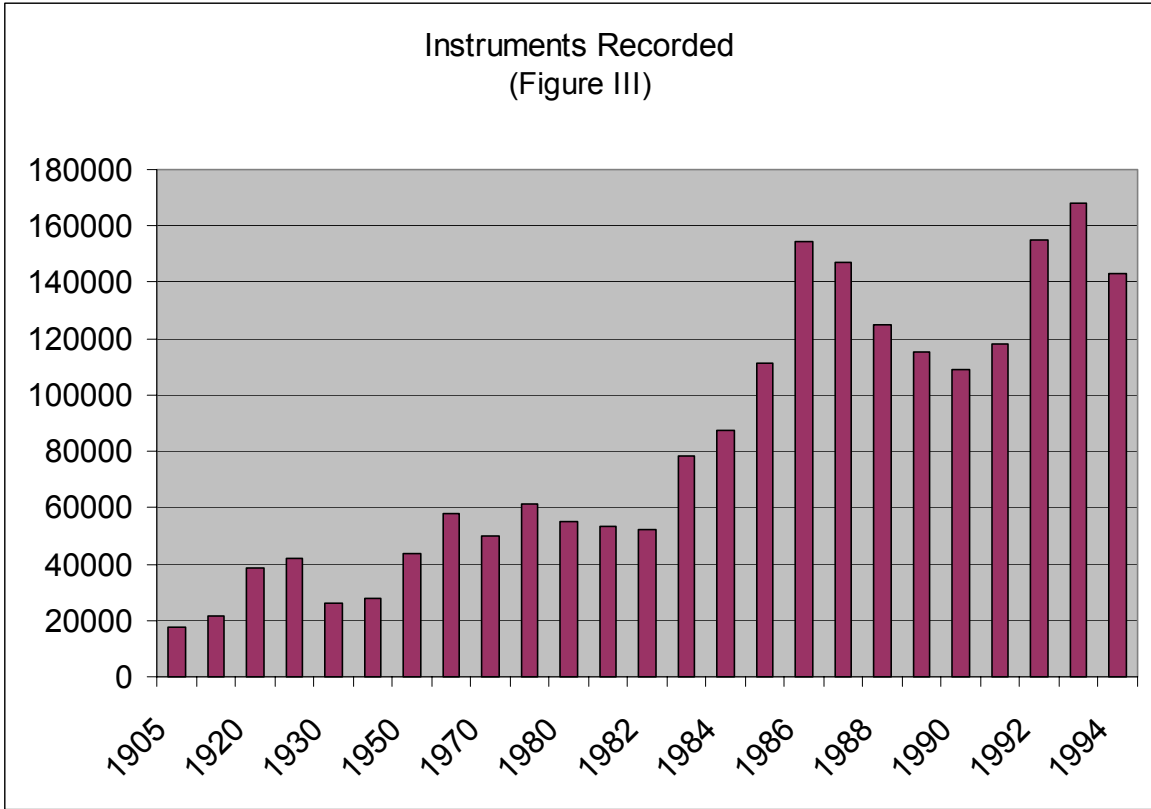
The computer system, which he introduced in the Worcester Registry, has since been copied in several other Registry offices throughout Massachusetts. Mr. Vigliotti is a graduate of Gage Street Elementary School, North High School and received an Associate of the Arts degree from Worcester Junior College, AB degree in government from Clark University, a Juris Doctorate from Suffolk University School of Law and a Masters in Criminal Justice from Anna Maria College. Mr. Vigliotti has three sons, Joseph J. Vigliotti, John Kennedy Vigliotti, and Stephen A. Vigliotti.



As evidenced by the graph above, the Registry has consistently and exponentially improved itself financially throughout history. In some instances, the increased revenues were caused by increased recording fees, rather than by increased document recordings. However, the only extended declines in revenues came just prior to and during the Depression and the housing booms of the 1980s. The figures here reflect those revenues that went directly to the County Treasurer. The Registry also collects State Excise fees. When a person's interest in realty is conveyed and exceeds one hundred dollars (\$100.00), a state excise tax is imposed. These amounts are not included in this graph (see figure II)



Following the abolition of county government in 1998, the Registry of Deeds became an office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The graph above shows total of revenues including state excise tax.



As with Registry of Deeds revenues, instrument recordings tailed off during the Depression and after the housing boom of the 1980s. However, for the past two decades the figure has regularly exceeded 100,000 instruments.