



# CLERK | REGISTER OF DEEDS



Annual Report  
2015

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# OTTAWA COUNTY



**Justin F. Roebuck**

## MESSAGE FROM THE CLERK/REGISTER

To the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners and Residents of Ottawa County:

Along with the dedicated team in the Clerk/Register’s Office, I would like to present our 2015 Annual Report. Our daily goal remains **to provide excellence in the preservation of our public records and superior customer service to the citizens of Ottawa County**, and we made great strides toward improving both customer service and access to our records in 2015.

In April we formed an internal Communications Team, led by staff representing each division of the office. That team has worked diligently on a number of projects to improve our efforts at communication, both internally within our office, and externally with the public. Just one of the Communications Team’s major projects in 2015 was a complete overhaul of the Clerk/Register webpage, previously comprised of separate web pages for Clerk and Register of Deeds. Content was replaced and key information made more accessible and user friendly with the revised page.

In June we launched an online application for ordering certified copies of birth records, which was a major step forward for customer convenience, while continuing to maintain the security of our birth records. Online orders for birth quickly surpassed orders by mail and fax, and allowed for a same day turnaround on customer orders. In September we took a major step forward in allowing online access for residents to search our index of documents at the Register of Deeds Office free of charge.

Prominently displayed on the wall in each of our office locations is the statement: “We Live the Golden Rule”. In this large and growing community, we are fortunate to have a great deal of technology and resources at our fingertips to assist us in providing great service. However, at the end of the day, real customer service is simple and relational. It’s treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves. Great customer service is not only a value we aspire to, but I believe it is a fundamental responsibility we have to our citizens. Our taxpayers deserve a government that works effectively and frugally, and respects each individual, while providing the vital services that they need.

<u>INSIDE THIS ISSUE:</u>	
MESSAGE FROM THE CLERK/REGISTER	2
CUSTOMER SERVICE	3
VITAL RECORDS DIVISION	4-5
CIRCUIT COURT RECORDS DIVISION	6-7
ELECTIONS DIVISION	8-9
REGISTER OF DEEDS DIVISION	10-11
ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES	12

Many thanks to our Board of Commissioners and the Administrative Team. We could not do the work we do without the cooperation, resources and support you provide. It’s been a privilege to serve as your County Clerk and Register of Deeds for another year!



The Clerk/Register of Deeds office received 20 nominations for Ottawa County's Outstanding Customer Service Award in 2015!



Here's what our customers have to say about the service they receive...

*respect*  
**listens** *exceptional*  
*willingness to serve*  
**customer service**  
*nonjudgmental*  
**patient** *friendly*  
*informative*  
**respectful**  
*sympathetic*  
*above and beyond*  
**professional** *service with a smile*  
*respect*  
*happy*  
**helpful** *kind*  
*smiling* *outstanding job*  
**courteous**  
*pleasant*  
**knowledgeable**  
*extra mile*  
**polite**  
**outstanding**  
**excellent job**  
**efficient**  
*nice job*  
**professional**

Meet some of our staff recognized as Employee All Stars this year!  
(Pictured from left to right: Amber Reagan, Zachary VanOsdol, Jacki Eastling)



## DIVISION OVERVIEW

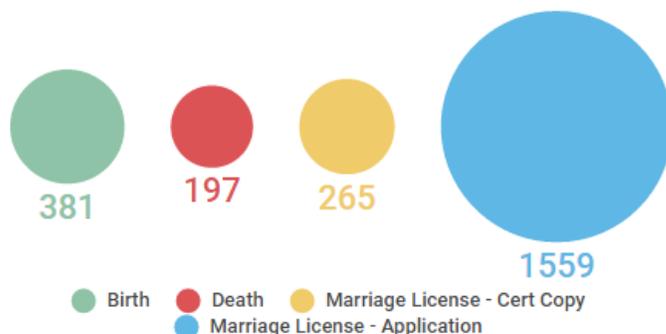
The Vital Records Division assists Ottawa County citizens with the filing of and obtaining birth certificates, applications for marriage licenses, marriage certificates, and death certificates and genealogy research. Certified copies can be obtained by visiting one of our four offices located throughout the county, or by mail, fax or through our new online request system.

The addition of the online request system in 2015 has proven to be an efficient and well used tool to assist customers in obtaining records quickly. In 2015 a total of 2,402 transactions were completed online.

In addition the Vital Records Division assists with applications for concealed pistol license applications (CPL's), the recording of home births, Notary applications, and business registrations (DBA's).

In 2015 the Vital Records Division processed 6,522 birth certificates, 12,960 death certificates, and 691 certified copies of marriage licenses.

## Online Vital Records Requests: 2015



### Business Registrations (DBAs)

The Vital Records Division also administers and oversees business registrations for all of Ottawa County. If a business opens in the County it must register with our office unless it is a corporation or a limited liability company. The Vital Records Division assisted 1,033 business owners in properly registering their businesses.

### Military Discharge Papers (DD214)

Our office files military discharge papers, DD214, for veterans as a complementary gesture. Should they ever need a copy they can obtain a certified one through our office.

### Notary Public

Almost all legal papers must be notarized. Therefore, Notary Publics are an important part of society and we administer an oath to each notary applicant, file, and manage the surety bonds.

### Oaths of Office

An Oath of Office is for those individuals who must be sworn in to their respective offices. Oaths of Office are prepared and filed in our office.

“Home Run! I went in for my CPL renewal... [She] was an absolute peach. Keep her on your team. She treated me pleasantly, was helpful and gracious. Keep up the good work!”

-Ottawa County Customer

**Concealed Weapons Permits (CPL)**

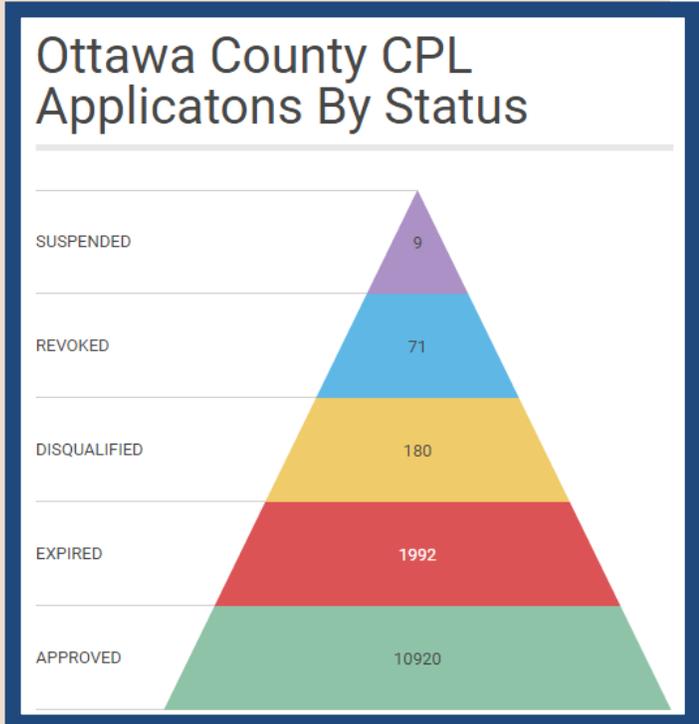
Concealed weapons applications are accepted at all four County Clerk offices and are processed, and stored out of the Fillmore office. As of December 1, 2015, Michigan State Police have taken over all background check processing for CPLs and have rolled out a new system for accepting and issuing applications.

With customer service in mind, this new system has a faster turn around time (30 days/renewal, 45 days/new) and allows applicants to use any LiveScan fingerprint vendor in the State of Michigan.

Applicants no longer need to pay for a passport quality photo because the system allows our office to use the photo taken by the Secretary of State.

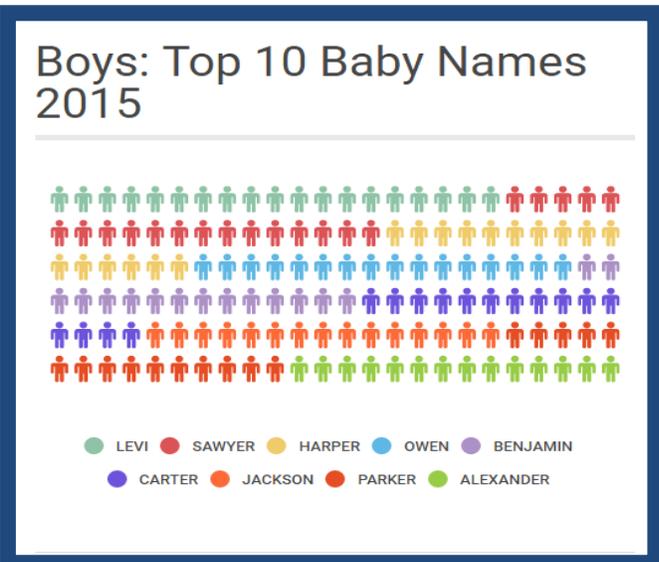
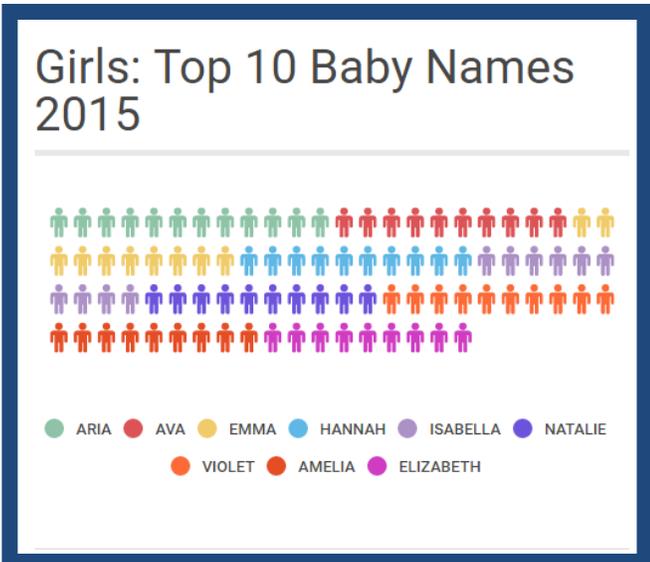
A CPL is granted after each applicant has met all requirements (including successful completion of an 8-hour Pistol Safety Training Course) and successfully passing the background check.

In 2015, a total of 2,762 CPL's were processed. This is compared to 2014 where 2,399 were processed.



**Home Births**

Over the past few years Ottawa County has seen a significant increase in parents opting for home birth or mid-wife deliveries. After the arrival of the child, the parents must visit our office to file the proper paperwork to obtain their child's Birth Certificate. The Vital Records Division has processed 38 home birth registrations in 2015.



## DIVISION OVERVIEW

The Circuit Court Records Division of the Clerk/Register's Office is the fundamental access point to the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court for all parties in a Civil, Criminal or Family Relations Court matter. It is here where customers get their first interaction with the court system. We strive to make these transactions as seamless and pleasant as possible by providing various legal forms, providing access to public court records, and answering questions regarding various legal procedures.

Our services include processing documents necessary to initiate new cases filed with the Court, receiving, reviewing and processing all documents pertaining to pending matters before the Court, pulling court records for scheduled hearings, and clerking in the courtroom. Our behind the scenes efforts to ensure accurate and timely records help create superior customer service for the citizens of Ottawa County.

"In an ugly situation she was able to provide a calm and collective demeanor. She not only was able to explain the paperwork... but went the extra mile in helping them understand the legal process without giving legal advice."

-Ottawa County Customer

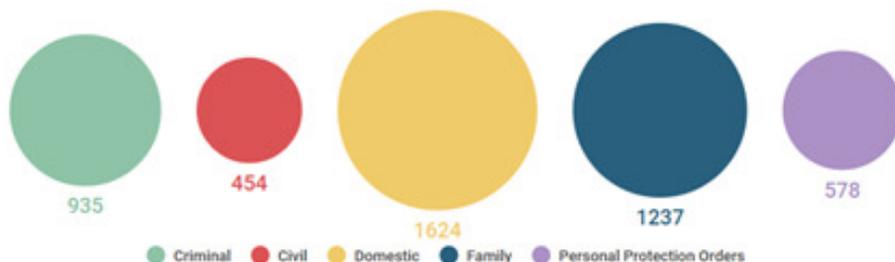
Restitution	\$442,405
Attorney Fees	\$278,917
Bonds	\$244,494
Victim Rights	\$80,170
Fines	\$448,915
Community Service	\$5,126
State Minimum	\$52,775
Filing Fees	\$221,869
Order Fees	\$219,465
Motion Fees	\$46,430
Jury Trial Fees	\$10,455
Garnishments	\$7,350

## Accounting

The Clerk's Office is responsible for receipting in all payments for the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. This includes all mandated state statute fees and court ordered fines, costs and restitution. Collaboratively, with the Circuit Court Collections Officers and the Probation Department, the Clerk's Office generally receipts in over \$1,500,000 a year for all criminal court cases.

Additionally, the Clerk's Office offers the citizens of Ottawa County a multitude of ways to access the court. Individuals can pay court costs and fines online, at our three office locations in Grand Haven, Holland or West Olive, through the mail, or individuals can e-file their court documents and fees to the court.

## Circuit Court Records Cases in 2015



The Circuit Court Records Division handled 4,828 cases and countless documents in 2015. Throughout the year, there were also 25 cases that went to the Court of Appeals or Michigan Supreme Court.

## Annual Report to the State Court

The Michigan State Court Administrator's Office annually requests a caseload report that identifies important case data, such as the number of new cases filed each year as well as the age of each case from the initial filing date to the date of disposition. Each year, the Circuit Court Records Department helps prepare and submit this data to the state. The Clerk's Office collaboratively works with the Circuit Court Staff to review these statistics and improve upon the previous year's data. Improvements to our procedures help to ensure that our residents are satisfied with their overall court experiences.

## Reporting to State Agencies

The Circuit Court Records Division is responsible for reporting all convictions of a felony, high court misdemeanor or probation violation to the Michigan Secretary of State, Michigan State Police, and the Michigan Department of Corrections. These reports help create accurate records for the public to access at the state level. In addition, all cases involving a motor vehicle are abstracted to the Secretary of State so it may take necessary actions to uphold and protect the citizens of Michigan.

## Jury

Each year the Clerk's Office is responsible for the selection of the Jury Pool for Ottawa County. Five thousand qualification questionnaires are sent out and processed annually. From those qualified to serve, the Clerk's Office summons, processes request for excusals, handles the payroll, and provides correspondence to jurors verifying their jury service for the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. It is a citizen's civil duty to serve on a jury, but it is Clerk's Office obligation to make that experience as seamless and as informative as possible.

"These ladies go above and beyond to help get babies to their forever homes as quickly as possible... [and] make Ottawa County BY FAR the best court to work with!! They are always professional, kind and helpful. I wish I could work with more people like them!"

—Ottawa County Adoption Agency

## Permanency Indicator Report

Since 2015, the Circuit Court Records Division has prepared and submitted the Permanency Indicator Report to the State Court Administrator's Office. This analysis captures the progress of each abuse and neglect case where a child has been removed from the home by the Department of Health and Human Services. These reports are examined to develop quicker methods to facilitate what is in the best interests for the child. The Clerk's Office plays an integral role in scheduling and producing orders that adhere to the performance measures set by the State Court Administrator's Office.

## Friend of the Court

The Circuit Court Records Division works closely with the Friend of the Court office on all parenting time, custody and support matters before the Court. In addition, this office helps facilitate and issue all Bench Warrants, provides assistance in the courtroom during proceedings, provides certified copies of all orders, and assists the public in answering any procedural questions.

### DIVISION OVERVIEW

The Clerk/  
Register is

the chief election official in Ottawa County.

While local jurisdictions run much of the day-to-day operations of elections, the Elections Division is responsible for the proper administration of elections, the proper accumulation of countywide results, and the maintenance of election records in perpetuity.

Ottawa County is unique in Michigan, as one of only two counties in the state that owns all of the election equipment in the county. Most election equipment is owned and maintained at the local level. Providing this service at the county-level provides excellent customer service for our local jurisdictions and saves a great deal of taxpayer dollars throughout the county.

Other responsibilities of the Elections Division include the programming and printing of all ballots, maintenance and testing of all elections equipment, and the training of nearly all of Ottawa County's 1,000 election workers. The Elections Division also works closely with state and local candidates who file in our office, and maintains the Campaign Finance records of a number of those candidates countywide. We pride ourselves on providing excellent customer service for all of our candidates by working proactively to notify all of our campaign finance filers of filing deadlines in a timely fashion.

The Elections Division is also responsible for staying informed on any key legislative

changes that may affect local clerks and election officials. We also work with the Michigan Association of County Clerks

Legislative Committee to advocate for new legislation that will improve the administration of the voting process.

69,243 ballots were cast in Ottawa County in 2015. This number is significantly higher than is typical for odd-numbered years. Voters decided several important ballot questions and elected new officials in several cities in Ottawa County.

We strive to provide excellent customer service for our colleagues, candidates, and voters.



### Road Funding Proposal

The largest election of the year was on May 5th, 2015. The State Legislature created this election in order to ask voters to approve a road funding package. Voters in Ottawa County voted against the proposal 77% to 23%. This margin of defeat roughly matches the results state-wide. Over 52,000 Ottawa County voters participated in this election, and we saw a county-level turnout of 28.4%, remarkably high for a May election.

## Ottawa County Voters

Ottawa County is the eight largest county in Michigan, and has approximately 190,000 registered voters. The Elections Division processed 4,821 total new voter registration records in 2015. This is significantly lower than previous years. Our division is estimating that the number of new voter registrations processed by our office in 2016 will be twice as much as the figure from 2015.

“Thanks so much for letting us join the election fair to learn about the new possibilities for election equipment. We are excited to be a part of the new way for the future!”

- Local Election Official



## Campaign Finance

All candidates, political action committees and ballot question committees at the county and local level are required to report the income and expenditures of their campaign by filing campaign finance reporting with the office of the County Clerk.

In 2015, the Elections Division began noticing Campaign Finance committees when they had reports due. This was in response to legal changes that mandated quarterly campaign finance reports for all committees with \$1,000 or more in campaign finance activity.

## New Election Equipment

On September 18th, 2015, the Elections Division, along with the Ottawa County Clerk’s Association, hosted an Election Equipment Vendor Fair for local clerks. This fair was attended by three major election system providers who displayed election equipment to over fifty election officials. As counties across Michigan gear up to purchase new equipment, our office felt that having our local clerks’ input was immensely valuable. Many of our local clerks took a great deal of time to thoroughly review the choices presented, and their input will be key to replacing our aging equipment.



## DIVISION OVERVIEW

The Register of Deeds Division records all documents pertaining to real property including Deeds, Mortgages, Liens,

Power of Attorneys, Certificates of Trust; Federal, State and MESC Tax Liens; Master Deeds and Plats; Sheriff's Deeds and Redemption Certificates.

Our staff must be familiar with over 100 different types of documents and their unique statutes for recording. Our staff works closely with attorneys, real estate agents, banks, title agencies and the public. Excellent customer service is provided through effective communication and interaction to accommodate our varied clientele, all the while ensuring their needs are adequately met in a timely manner.

Our public record is used to verify ownership, track chain of title, and obtain constructive notice. It is paramount to the buying and selling of property. The demand for access to these records has led us to offer them electronically. In an effort to increase

The Ottawa County Register of Deeds office has achieved top ten status in the State of Michigan for its innovative approach to office operations.

“You are definitely doing something right in your office! I give thanks to you, too, for encouraging your employees to do their very best for their customers, including those of us who call from out of state! “

-Ottawa County Customer

customer convenience and satisfaction, they are available on our new Deeds Search tab found on our website. We have a robust webpage that has been redesigned with helpful links and icons. Our revised webpage is more user-friendly. It allows for an online search, electronic recording of documents, ordering copies of recorded documents, property information, as well as recording statistics and foreclosure prevention Information.

### Free Online Search

In September of 2015, we launched a free online search of our index to all documents, resulting in a total of 1,275 searches and \$4,578.25 in revenue from documents purchased online in just four months.

### PLAT BOARD

The Plat Board reviews preliminary subdivision plans presented by engineers and approves final plats to be submitted to the State for their acceptance.

In 2015 we reviewed 18 Preliminary Plats and approved 12 Final Plats.

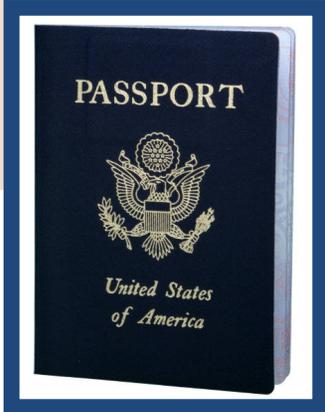




"She treats each call in our office as if it is the first call of the day. She is a great asset to our department and to the face (voice) of Ottawa County."  
 -Ottawa County Customer

**DOCUMENTS AND FUNDS**

In 2015, we recorded **49,805** documents. Of these, **19,430** were electronically recorded accounting for **39%** of our recordings. This translates to **231,978** pages.



**PASSPORTS**

The Register of Deeds Division accepted 3,154 Passport applications for a total revenue of \$78,850.00.

### County Directory

The Clerk/Register's office is responsible for updating the County Directory. The directory is a tool aimed at helping the public navigate Ottawa County's numerous departments and services. A great deal of staff hours go into collecting information and gathering data for this directory. The directory is available on-line at the bottom of the "MiOttawa.org" homepage.

### Posting Vacancies

The Clerk/Register's office oversees vacancies on any board, commission or advisory committee for the County. These postings and applications are available online at "MiOttawa.org".

### Clerk of the Board of Commissioners

The Clerk/Register serves as the Secretary to the Board of Commissioners, and the keeper of all official Board records. Though we do not print or distribute the agendas, we are required to attend and post all Board and Committee meetings. The permanent Board minutes are kept on record in our office and are available for public perusal. In 2015, we filed 358 Board approved contracts and processed 44 Board Resolutions. We also handle correspondence for the Commissioners.

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COUNTY OF OTTAWA