

Kelly Walker – Oral History Transcription

Interviewee: **Kelly Walker**

Interviewers: **Jenifer Baker** (Deputy Archivist), **Tori Otten** (Archives Technician)

Date of Interview: 17 May 2023

List of Initials: JB = Jenifer Baker, TO = Tori Otten, KW = Kelly Walker

Location of Interview: Warren County Admin Building in Lebanon, Ohio

Transcriber: Ted Hitchens (Records Specialist)

[Begin transcription 00:00:05]

TO: Today is Wednesday, May 17th, 2023. My name is Tori Otten and I am the archival specialist of the Warren County Records Center and Archives. I am here with my coworker Jenifer Baker, the deputy archivist for the county. And today we are doing an oral history on prior employees if our guest would like to introduce herself.

KW: Hi, I'm Kelly Walker. And I am retiring after thirty-one years from the Warren County Recorder's Office and Warren County Map Room.

TO: Thank you very much for being here today. So we can start getting into this. We have the beginning, so if you would like to share with us when and where you were born.

KW: I was born in Wilmington, Ohio on March 16th, 1970.

TO: And where did you grow up?

KW: I grew up in Clinton County (*Ohio*) until I was about six and then my parents moved to Springboro, Ohio.

TO: So have you lived in Springboro your whole life then?

KW: When I first got married, my husband and I moved to Waynesville. We lived there a couple of years and then we moved back to Springboro and raised our kids there.

TO: So before you worked at the county, which – thirty-one years, obviously you’ve been here awhile – did you have any jobs prior to working here?

KW: I worked for a local attorney – Coffman & Florence – here in town. And I was a runner for them, so when I ended up getting hired at the county I kinda knew a lot of people because I ran and did different things in the different offices. Courts, and then Recorder’s, Map Room, all that – I ran documents and recorded for them.

TO: Definitely an interesting process, good to hear. So that was the background questions, so now we can start off talking about more of the departmental side of it. So you’ve already said you’ve worked at the Map Room and Recorder’s Office but do you have a timeframe for when you worked at those?

KW: I got hired on March 9th, 1992 in the map room and I worked in the map room for twenty-one years. And then when Linda Oda became the Recorder, I came over and worked for her for the past ten years in the Recorder’s Office.

TO: And have these departments always been in the same location?

KW: Yes. Well – no. We were on ... Silver Street ... both offices were there, so I was in the map room the whole time there. We were connected with the Auditor’s Office, just a really small room. It was crazy. We had, you know, just the maps. There was no mapping on the computers or anything at that time, so it was just the map books out. And we would check all the documents on the maps; the map room at that time checked every document that got recorded. The Recorder’s Office now checks the majority of them, but at that time the map room checked everything. So we would have to go to the maps and look up the legal description, you know, the property on the map.

JB: So if you’re walking in the front door of the courthouse, where was the map room located within the old courthouse?

KW: The side door – when you walked in, the Recorder’s was on the right walking in that hall. And then the map room and Auditor’s was on the left, I believe...

JB: Is that where the Resource Room is today?

KW: No, it’s the children ... I can’t think of it.

TO: So did you move to this building with the Map Room when it opened?

KW: Yes.

TO: So, you already touched on this a bit but what were some of the daily tasks and duties that you would have for- let's start with the map room.

KW: Well at the time, all the plats- like if surveyors would come in or the title examiners, we had to go to the Recorder's Office (and) get the mylars which are now I think stored down here (*Records Center*) – the big 24-by-36 mylars and we had a blueprint machine and we would have to run them through that. And it was ammonia so it stunk up the whole room, it was terrible! Some surveyors during the craziness of all the (building construction) would come in a just get like thirty plats.

TIME 00:05:00 MARK

KW: And so they would bring them over and we would just have to run them through these machines. So we recorded the plats, we recorded surveys, and again it was all on mylar. There was no maps. At that time they would update the maps – the tax maps – the mylars for those were kept at the Engineer's Office. So Suzanne who's still in the map room, she would go to the Engineer's Office a couple times a week, and any new subdivisions that had been recorded or survey-splits, she would actually ink the mylars to make them current to the tax maps. So then she would take a book out (and) work on that book for any changes that were made and then she would ink the mylars, and make new copies of the pages and bring the book back.

JB: You kind of touched on this but historically, Warren County- I feel like that's when they really started to develop a lot of the neighborhoods that currently exist, right?

KW: Yes.

JB: So that was probably a crazy time to be in that.

KW: It was. There were actually two of them that did the inking and so they would take turns. And so if a new subdivision would get brought in – or a split – we would do it in red ink in the books (and) paper maps. So they knew when they took that book out there to ink it, anything in red is what they had to add to those mylars.

JB: I'm assuming you're taking what was rural farmland and then just, you know...

KW: ...Mapping it into subdivisions. Springboro at that time was going crazy, a lot of them. But so anything in red we knew was not on the mylar if they wanted to go get a copy of that mylar. So the, like I said, they would ink them, make new copies, and put it in the books. It is crazy to think back on that stuff. I was saying a few minutes ago that when all that development was going on, again everything in red, it was not on the mylar so appraisers would get a call to go appraise this property of this new subdivision. Well they had no clue where this subdivision was because it wasn't on any map and there was no GPS. So they would call the map room and we literally would have to go to the map and tell them "you want to go here and turn right on this road" – we'd tell them the name of the road ... because the subdivision was there at that time, it just wasn't on anything. It wasn't on any maps so we would describe for them how to get to these properties. And then they'd be like "oh okay, I'm here!" Luckily, cell phones were around. We had at the time- we didn't have cordless phones. So we had these phones that literally had cords that were like thirty feet! And daily that phone would get pulled off and you'd hear "sorry!" because you were trying to stretch it so far to get to whatever book you needed to get to for the information.

JB: So you mentioned that there was not GPS while you in the map room, did that transition in technology also take place?

KW: Yes. The GIS department (*Geographic Information System*) was created when I was in the map room.

JB: What was that like?

KW: It was very, very new. So I mean there were, I don't know, one or two people and when they first started the GIS department, they were back where the Prosecutor's (Office) was in that old house behind the building on Silver Street.

JB: Did people embrace those technological changes?

KW: No. It was a long time until anything really—We knew they were working on it and we were like "what is it?" But it was a long time before it was ever used.

TO: Did you guys get to hear a lot of complaints from the public then, that it was like a shift was happening?

KW: No, not really.

TO: That's good.

KW: No, I don't recall that.

JB: Do you know who worked in the GIS department?

KW: Bob Cassella. And he has passed away. His wife Ann may still work for the Engineer's Office, I'm not sure. And then Dawn Johnson came and took it over, but I think Dawn – I don't think she was here until we were in this building (*406 Justice Drive*). And that's really when it started taking off.

TIME 00:10:00 MARK

TO: Just for clarity, the Map Room, what department is it technically part of?

KW: So the Map Room is under the Engineer's Office.

TO: Has it always been?

KW: Yes. It's basically called the Tax Map Department. So, the Auditor's (Office) gets their tax information as far as the land – not the buildings – from the Map Room. In Warren County, we have what's called the Sidwell System, and that was created in 1979 so it was prior to me. Every piece of property in Warren County is given a Sidwell number ... it's basically a social security number for that property. So anything that gets recorded in Warren County, whatever legal description it is, has that parcel number on it. So then if you came in and you were like "I want to know what's going on on this piece of property", you type in that Sidwell number and everything comes up. So deeds of mortgages, assignments of mortgages, releases of mortgages – the documents would come into our office and we had to put the parcel number on each document according to the legal description, and then approve it.

TO: I knew the process was extensive ... !

KW: ... And then it would go to the Recorder's Office to get recorded. But any transfer documents like deeds- after we would approve them, they would go to the Auditor's Office and the Auditor would transfer them – like transfer the deed, and then they would come to the Recorder's to get recorded.

JB: So I'm assuming that's why the Map Room is located in the Administration Building as opposed to being located with the Engineer's (Office).

KW: Yep, exactly. And I don't know if in other counties- I think the Map Room is sometimes under the Auditor's Office. I'm not quite sure why it's under the Engineer's but it is.

TO: So, say you take some of these farmlands and someone decides to develop them and turn them into separate plats (or) plots – I honestly don't know the difference – but say that you start with that process, and the house is built, and this and that, and it's sold off to another person. How lengthy is that process for you to be passed around amongst all these departments to get it officially recorded?

KW: So let's say this farmer decides he wants to divide his property up. He has to go to the Planning Department, whether it's Warren County Planning or the different municipalities, and get their planning first that they're allowed to do this. And then they would hire a surveyor. The surveyor would do all the work then it comes into the Map Room. And the Map Room also- each parcel that is- usually they have like a meets and bounds description or you'll see like "North 24." You know what I'm saying? Each of those parcels has to close within .02 feet, so part of my job in the Map Room was I would what we call "run closure" on those to make sure that the surveyors had everything so that it was pinpointed right to that. So you go through all that process of getting the plat recorded. It would come into the Map Room first, at that point let's say it was a ten-acre parcel, the way the Sidwell system in Warren County works is like I said each parcel has its own "social security number." So let's say that parcel number was for this ten acres. So when this plat comes in, now you have twenty lots. So the Map Room signs was called a new-parcel number. So they have the old number, which is what it was when it was ten acres. And then they have all these new numbers, and then they may even have a remainder number so maybe only seven acres was platted. So you have old, then all the new numbers and then the remainder. So we would assign the parcel numbers and then it would go to the Auditor's, they would transfer them all and then go to the Recorder's and that's when they are officially created once they are recorded in the Recorder's Office. And then they can sell them off once they're created.

TIME 00:15:00 MARK

KW: And so then once they're sold off, a new deed would be created for say "Lot 20 of Springbrook Subdivision" let's just say. So a new deed would be created. The lot is already created because the plat recording creates that lot. And then it would go to the Auditor's to get transferred from the farmer who developed it, to the new owner, then to the Recorder's – if that makes sense.

TO: It does. It's just "oh my gosh!"

KW: That is still how it happens. It's just a lot more technology used in doing it. Because like I said, that was when they would do all the inking and stuff on the tax maps.

TO: Did technology speed up the process?

KW: Extremely.

TO: Okay. I was hoping you would say that!

KW: Extremely. Yeah, almost too much on days. I mean, honestly it's just so efficient now, especially in the Recorder's which we'll get to that.

TO: Well in case, what do you do in the Recorder's Office?

KW: So in the Recorder's Office, we record all of the deeds and mortgages. Used to, like I said, the Map Room checked all the legals. I don't even remember – probably fifteen years ago or so when it was just crazy booming – the Map Room just got slammed. So I believe at that time the Recorder's Office started checking like releases of mortgages because it was kinda something that they didn't necessarily have to look at the map to do because they were looking at the prior legal description of what was being recorded. So the Map Room started checking the releases – I'm sorry, the Recorder's – so we would check the legal description and put the parcel number on them and then record them. Over time, now basically, all the Map Room checks is the transfer docs. So (in) the Recorder's, we check all the legal descriptions and put the parcel numbers on all the documents that are getting recorded, except for transfer docs which are deeds. And then we record them, we enter them into the system. What's really changed in there is that we're now online. So it used to (be) we would have stacks of documents that would get recorded that people would bring in – paper documents – and handwrite the numbers on them. I would say 80 to 90 percent of the documents now come in through e-recording, so we don't even have the paper documents in our office anymore.

KW: Used to in the Map Room, or the Recorder's, we'd have certain people that would record and it could take up to two or three weeks for people to get their documents mailed back to them because they have to go through this check process. Today, people get their documents back that day because they're e-recorded. So we have a multiple-person check on the documents that we do. Now the transfer docs, they come into us first and then once we do the page-count, we make sure that all the requirements are there for us as far as who the document was prepared by – the notary to make sure all of that's there. Then we send it to the Map Room, then they check it and approve the legal description. Then they send it to the Auditor's. The Auditor's (Office) transfers it – and again, this is all online now – and then it comes back to us and we record it. And then the paper documents – which are very few – there are still some older attorneys that don't like change. They still either bring in their documents or mail them in. Anybody in our office can do it, but there's particularly one person who does the mail now because there's not much. And again, the transfer docs she still takes to the Map Room, they check them, and then we walk them over to the Auditor's Office and then they'll usually go back out the next day in the mail to those people – which again, literally it was sometimes three or four weeks before they would get back because just all the checks. So to say technology has helped – yes. I mean to some degree ... sometimes we're like “okay, now what.” Because it's very efficient.

TIME 00:20:00 MARK

KW: Used to when I first started working the Recorder's – and in the Map Room – literally there would be anywhere from ten to fifteen title examiners in the Recorder's Office daily. There were some people who only do Warren County work, so those title examiners – it was like they were county employees. They really weren't but they came to work here every day. We would have our Christmas parties and stuff and they would be included because they literally- they were in our office every single day. And now we don't see them anymore, so that's really sad to me.

JB: So, we're talking about technological changes. You were in the Recorder's Office during the Covid pandemic, so I'm assuming some of those changes were really driven home during that time.

KW: Yes. We started just e-recording releases first. Before Covid, we started recording everything online but not as many people used it. And at that point we went home to work and our office literally never shut down for one day during Covid. A couple of them were in here at all times, a couple of the supervisors, and we all worked from home for a while. So literally we never got an extra day off for Covid. And then it's just, I mean- the title examiners can do their searches online now, so we just don't see any people. That's really hard.

TO: We used to get title examiners occasionally come down here. But even still, maybe one every couple of months now and it's always some very unique situation that brings them back.

KW: Exactly. Right. The good thing about Covid is that I do work from home two days a week. Before this technology, you just could not have. So the people at home work on the documents that come in on e-recording and the Auditor's Office also has someone that works from home. So we're recording the documents; they're going from our office to the Map Room to the Auditor's and then to the Recorder's, but typically it's the people at home that do that work.

TO: Well you've already said some things that obviously we did not know about your role. But do you have anything that you could say that people would not know about your roles at the Map Room or the Recorder's Office?

KW: I can't think of anything. I probably pretty much covered (*indecipherable*).

TO: I've learned so much today! So in that regard, the Map Room versus the Recorder's Office – was there a change in how you interacted with the public, or do you interact with the public more at one office versus the other?

KW: At the time it was pretty much the same because the title examiners were in the Map Room all the time too. I think even nowadays if a title examiner has a difficult examination, they still like to look at those paper maps ... It's the same thing now- they put the changes on the paper maps. The only thing is they're not updating the mylars anymore. They do the updates on the computer, but they also do it on the paper maps – those big books – they just don't keep (inking the mylars).

TO: Fair enough.

KW: We had title examiners in there all the time and in our office – and in the Auditor's Office. Like I said, anywhere from ten to fifteen a day. And now we may see one person come in our office once a week.

TO: So, you've obviously worked with a lot of amazing people in thirty-one years. Is there anybody – be it a coworker, manager, or otherwise – that you think has really had an impact on you?

KW: My first boss in the Map Room – Homer Hendrickson. He was just an amazing boss ... He was a great guy. I mean I've worked with, like you said, a lot of great people.

TIME 00:25:00 MARK

KW: When I first got hired, during my interview I was hired by Rick Pendleton – the county engineer at that time. At the interview, he asked me if there was anything else and I said “well one more thing, I'm pregnant!” I was pregnant with my first son at the time. And, you know, I didn't know how that would go and Homer was just great. He was always like “if your kids need something...” because I was in his office when my kids were small. And he would hear me talking on the phone to one of my kids, and he would like “is everything okay, do you need to leave?” ... I mean it was (wonderful) ... It was nice ... I'm sure my current boss would have been the same way, but my kids were little when I had him and he was just ... it was nice.

TO: We'll have to look more into that. I think you're the first person who's ever said that name to me. He sounds wonderful.

KW: Yeah, he was in the Map Room for a long time.

TO: So are there any memorable projects you got the experience of working on over the years?

KW: I would say the GIS. I did some stuff with them. But honestly, the conversion to e-recordings ... even though it's made things go so much faster in our office, and sometimes we're like “okay, now what?” Because things have slowed down too right now with the economy, with the interest rates of

course. I'm sure they'll pick up. Hopefully they will for everyone in there. But I just couldn't even imagine when Linda (Oda) first started talking about doing the e-recordings, but it has been really neat to see that come to fruition or whatever.

TO: Well in that regard, if it's say- when it comes to the housing market, if it's a buyer's market versus (a seller's market), are you much busier during that timeframe?

KW: Yes, more so if the interest rates are low.

TO: So with refinancing...?

KW: Yes.

TO: So the first year of Covid would have been very busy for all of you.

KW: We were slammed – slammed.

TO: I was going to say, I feel like everybody I knew was out there refinancing or buying a house.

KW: So if you refinance, you figure you're getting a new mortgage come in, and then you're getting a release of mortgage come in ... so, over time. So we were slammed when we were first at home. And even when we came back in the office we were slammed.

TO: So refinancing is almost double the work for you guys?

KW: Yes. But we welcome it because, you know, we would much rather, I think, be busy doing that kind of stuff.

TO: Well in general, you've answered our questions on your particular departments, so we are going to move onto broader questions of the county as a whole. So we've spoken of your memorable projects you were on. Are there any big highlights of your time with the county in general?

KW: Moving to this building was huge. The Map Room was – I don't know – maybe a quarter of the size it is now, literally. We were all in just one room and it was open to the Auditor's Office. There were filing

cabinets that divided the two. I was talking the other day – I can remember when I first started working at the county, they were allowed to – not me, I didn't – they were allowed to smoke in the building. And I mean, literally, you're in that closed ... I can remember some of the ladies in the Auditor's Office smoking at their desk. And at the time, you didn't think anything about it. But now it's like "oh my goodness" because you walk in somewhere ... I'm not a smoker, but I walk in somewhere and I'm like "ugh!" But literally, they sat at their desk and smoked and it was crazy!

TO: I don't think I realized; you were the first person that has ever mentioned that to us.

KW: It was just weird, but ... yeah, moving to this new building – well now it's not new but it still looks new – but this was huge. We just felt like we were in this, you know, mansion. And it is a very nice building.

TO: It is. So what was the county like then when you started versus now that you're leaving?

KW: The technology has changed it so much. The housing market when I started wasn't as crazy.

TIME 00:30:00 MARK

KW: I know other people that worked in the Map Room- they would say they would get a split which was when someone was split a piece of farmland whether it be one acre out or a subdivision, they would get a split (maybe) one every two weeks or so. When I was in the Map Room in the prime, I mean we would just have splits all the time. And then there were different periods of time in the economy when sheriff sales were a big thing too. And the Map Room did a lot for the sheriff sales. We would have to look the properties up (and) get property cards for them. The county has appraisers that would go out and appraise the property for the sheriff sales. We would have to hand-draw maps for the appraisers on how to get to these properties again to go out to appraise the property for the sheriff sale. And there were times, sadly, that we would have stacks of sheriff sales like this (*hand held high*) when the economy, you know. (The) sheriff sales have definitely slowed down over the years. Hopefully they'll stay down for people. But yeah, that's something else we did and that's changed a lot over the years.

TO: So did anything significant happen within the county government during your time? So we've had people in the past say Covid was obviously a big event that happened.

JB: 9/11 was impactful for a lot of people.

TO: Do you remember what that was like here? Were you in this building at the time?

KW: I was. I do remember – I just remember the day. That’s when Homer was the supervisor in the Map Room. We had a little black & white TV up there, and – I don’t know – Homer had brought it in years ago. It was a lot more laid back then, probably to watch basketball tournaments or something, I don’t know, it usually wasn’t on. But I can remember turning that on when we heard and my mom was calling me because my daughter was just starting kindergarten and she was like “should I send her to school?” and, you know, and (I’m like) “I don’t know!” And I just remember watching it. It’s very eerie. But I can remember when the second plane hit, we actually had that little TV on and was watching it when that happened. So yeah, that was definitely very impactful.

TO: Well, what are some important things that you have learned while working for Warren County?

KW: I’ve always just tried to do my best and put my time in, work hard when I’m here. I raised three kids. I always- at the time I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom but couldn’t afford it. I always made sure my kids knew that they came first, but also I had a job to do. Leaving in the mornings was sometimes difficult, “you’ve got to do this because I can’t be late.” You know, I’ve always tried to be a good employee, be honest, put my hours in, and not always agreed with stuff that went on but just – you know – it was my job. I had to do it. And I was fine with doing it because that was what I was getting paid to do.

TO: Fair enough. So you’re obviously going to be leaving here very shortly next week, so do you have anything you think you’re going to miss about being here?

KW: I’ll miss the people. But again since Covid, we don’t hardly see the people in the other offices. So it’s really sad. And only half of us work at a time in the office; there’s a couple girls in my office that I never work with. I mean, we are on Teams together. But I will miss the people, but it seems that’s kinda been gone the past couple years. Even people in the building – you just never see anyone ...
(*indecipherable chatter*) ... That’s very different. Yeah, I’ll miss that. I’ve got five grandkids under the age of five.

TO: Are you going to watch them?

KW: I’m not going to babysit every day. I don’t plan on doing that, but hopefully spend lots of time with them.

TO: Well, we’re onto our last question then: What advice would you give current employees?

KW: Just work hard. Do what you’re supposed to do.

TIME 00:35:00 MARK

KW: That's just my motto. That's just the type of person I am. If you're unhappy then do something else. But if you're committed and you're going to be an employee here, then be committed and do what you're supposed to do.

JB: Well do you have any last thoughts or anything else you would like to add?

KW: I don't think so. It's fun. I never, ever thought I'd be here 31 years! I can remember some of the older ladies in the day when I was younger ... and it's like that (*snaps finger*). Honestly, it's gone fast. It's gone so fast, it's crazy.

TO: Well in that regard, we thank you for your time and for speaking with us today.

KW: No problem.

TO: At this point, I am going to conclude the interview and thank you so much.

KW: Thank you.

[End transcription 00:36:06]