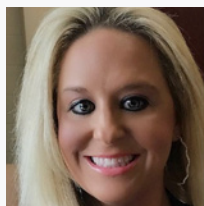


Case Study

# Saving the Legacy of Our County

## How Pickens County used federal funding for preservation and indexing



### Jennifer Jordan

Clerk of Court, Pickens County, GA

Like a lot of counties near a major city, Pickens County—approximately 55 miles north of Atlanta—has experienced rapid growth in the last 30 years. To manage that growth, many have focused on, “What comes next?” But Jennifer Jordan, Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Courts for Pickens County, GA successfully got elected with an eye toward the county’s past. As she explains in the following interview, her initiative to preserve and index the county’s deeds and records holds more value than just making life safer during the pandemic.



## How did this project get started?

Pickens County had a massive fire in 1947 that burned down our courthouse. Thankfully our records survived, but they sustained pretty significant damage. Obviously, there was some charring on the pages, but also a lot of water damage that, over time, turned into mold issues.

I’ve known of Kofile for a while now, and I knew that the Kofile team could remove this mold and revive and preserve any records pages that had smoke, char or water damage.

So, when I decided to run for office in 2016, that was one of the primary issues I campaigned on: let’s revamp the Pickens County deed room and make it user friendly while saving the legacy of our county records. That was something I was very passionate about, and I knew that was an initiative I could lead successfully.



## What did this project entail?

This project had a lot of moving parts to it. We started with the digital imaging and indexing of every single plat book and map, working our way from the oldest to the newest documents because we knew as we got closer to the present day that most of those deed records were not damaged.

The older deed records though – they were mostly moldy. There were 15 criminal dockets that were the most damaged. We have performed physical preservation on 26 of our oldest deed volumes thus far as well as some of our civil and criminal books. This physical preservation included cleaning, mending, tape removal, deacidifying and encapsulating these irreplaceable historical records. As part of the physical preservation, we have also digitally preserved these volumes using Kofile’s archival imaging services.

As we got closer to the present, there was also more to index. Before the growth of our county really took off, we had about 100 books for a 30-year period. Now we have about 100 books every two months. But those 100 older books are infinitely more valuable to our county. They belong in a museum!

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## How could a small country like Pickens pay for a project like this?

We worked in batches and did a few records at a time. Through an imaging agreement we have with the Georgia Superior Court Clerk’s Cooperative (GSCCCA), a.k.a. The Authority, we’ve been able to procure funds to digitize our records. The Authority works with Clerks throughout Georgia, and they set the standards that we must adhere to.



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When a book came back and people started to pay to access it, it meant that we could start to recoup our funds right away. Essentially the older books were helping pay for part of the newer books.

As part of this agreement with The Authority, every county has a built-in funding mechanism, whereby revenue generated from deed requests gets split between the Authority and the county itself. So, beyond preserving our history, digitizing our records also means increased revenue for Pickens County.

And for this project it meant we could fund the beginning parts of the project without having to tax the capital budget.

Also, this isn’t a fast-moving project, so when a book came back and people started to pay to access it, it meant that we could start to recoup our funds right away. Essentially the older books were helping pay for part of the newer books.





### Were you able to use federal funding to pay for this project?

Yes. During the pandemic, we were able to generate well over \$300,000 in revenue by making our records available online and enabling citizens and businesses to eFile while our office was shut down.

When it was announced that the county would receive CARES Act funding, we made the argument that if we could expand our project to index our deeds, we could generate even more revenue. The Board of Commissioners approved us for an additional \$120,000.

Of course, on top of revenue generation, these projects also reduced foot traffic in our office, which kept our citizens and staff safe. So, it was a no brainer for added funding.

### What's been the results?

Previously, if someone had to go into the vault room, they had to wear a mask to protect against any air pollutants that might be present. Now we no longer require citizens to wear a mask to browse in the vault room.

Also, the pages were so brittle, it was nearly impossible to turn pages without harming the books. Now the pages are sturdier, and available online. Folks can browse with peace of mind that they aren't damaging anything.

We also had this awesome response from our community that was so excited to see these new books start to come back. When Kofile delivered the first book, we had a little arrival ceremony that had a lot of positive reaction on social media. In fact, people were so impressed, a few citizens pooled their money to contribute to our efforts to preserve more books, so in the cover of one of the next books we dedicated that book to the citizens of Pickens.

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Schedule a consultation to address your critical records challenges and obligations

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