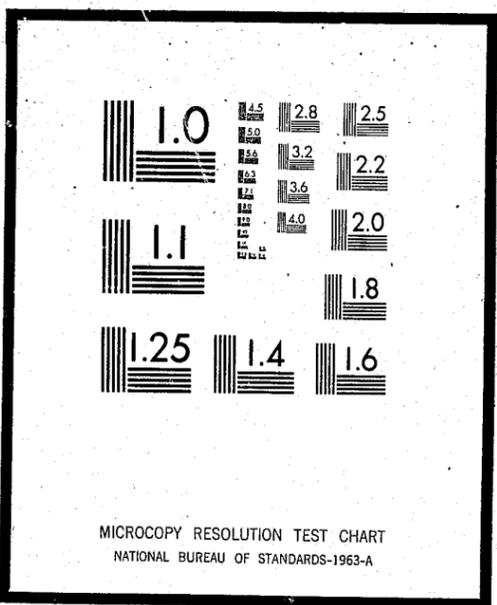


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MTR-2856

A Statewide Superior Court Criminal Case Management System for Massachusetts

Burton Kreindel
John P. Moreschi

9 August 1974

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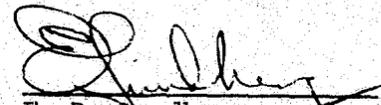
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ABSTRACT

Rather than using the traditional court data processing approach to system development, the designers of this complex information system describe the "total information system" concept they employed in meeting the court's needs. Several of the unique features of the multi-court system, including the service of busy court locations through CRT terminals while other locations mail data to a central data base are also described.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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A Statewide Superior Court Criminal Case
Management System for Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, as elsewhere in the state and federal courts, the machinery for the prosecution, defense and court disposition of criminal cases is wholly inadequate for handling the volume of litigation.¹

The most effective and practical method of improving the courts is not through any major reorganization but through the enlargement of the resources of each court in those respects in which they are needed, whether it be in the number of judges and of supporting personnel, in their facilities, or in the improvement of the procedures by which their business is conducted.²

The Superior Court of Massachusetts, through the design and development of the Court Case Management System has moved to meet the challenges to the administration of justice posed by an ever-increasing workload, limited numbers of court personnel, budgetary restrictions imposed by financially pressed state and county governments and the rapid expansion in the exercise of constitutional rights by criminal defendants. The Court Case Management System (CCMS) is part of the court's attempt to achieve the most effective

¹ Fourteenth Annual Report of the Executive Secretary to the Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, June 30, 1970, pp. 8-9.

² Ibid., p. 40.

use of its limited resources. The CCMS has been designed as a computer-based information system which will provide all court organizations -- judges, prosecution, defense, probation, clerks and sheriffs -- with day-to-day operational support, as well as with much needed management information and statistical summaries. With the tools provided by CCMS, it is expected that court administration can assume a more active management role, thereby improving both case handling and court resource utilization.

The Massachusetts Superior Court is a statewide court of general jurisdiction. It is the great trial court of the Commonwealth and may hear and try all cases, criminal and civil, at law and in equity, with jury and without. In criminal proceedings, the court is responsible for both appeals for trials de novo from the lower court level and indictments for criminal offenses returned by grand juries sitting in the 14 counties. The Court consists of a Chief Justice and 45 associate justices who are assigned to sit in the different county courthouses on a modified circuit basis.

Criminal court business is conducted in each of the state's 14 counties, holding criminal sessions in 19 locations, as shown in Figure 1. Of the 4040 trials conducted by the Superior Court during 1972, 1024 were held in Suffolk County (Boston), 726 trials took place in Middlesex County (Cambridge), the next busiest court, and the remainder were held in the other 12 counties (there were

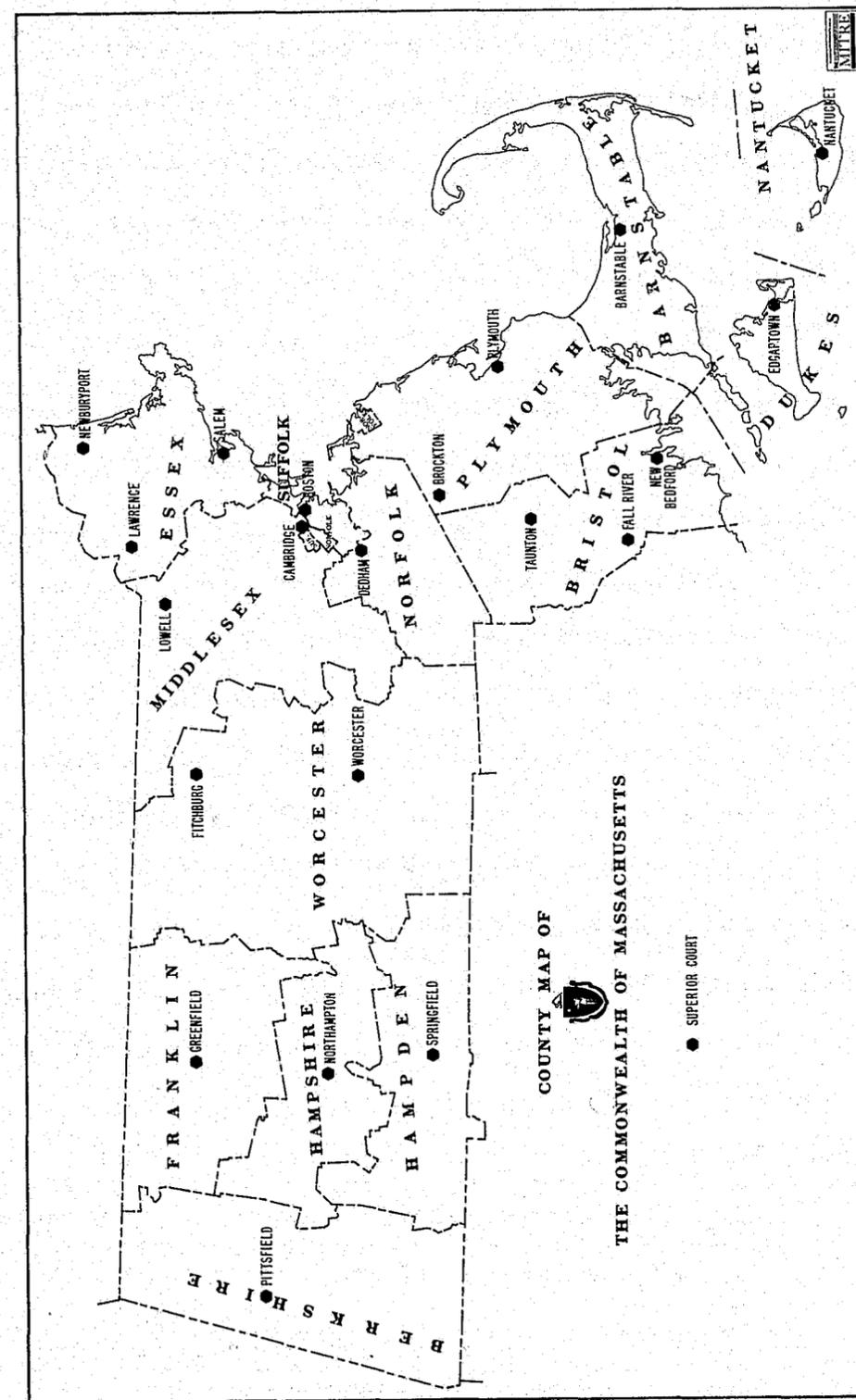


FIGURE 1. MASSACHUSETTS SUPERIOR COURT LOCATIONS

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only eight trials in Dukes County, the least busy). Over 92% of the criminal case workload occurs in the eight most populous counties. The busiest courts face a steady schedule of criminal case activities throughout the operating year; the other courts have only periods of intense activity while criminal sessions are being held (typically two or three times a year).

Symptoms of the problems in criminal court operations became evident to the court's Chief Justice³ in 1969. Among these was a seven month delay in reaching trial, the growing caseload, the exploding backlog, the general low productivity of court personnel, an apparent overall lack of control, direction, or management of the court's operations and an increasingly poor public image of the court and its role in the administration of justice. The Chief Justice, thereupon initiated a study of the court's management and information system. The study became the first step in a multiphased approach to the design and implementation of a total criminal case management information system. The resulting system, the CCMS, has now been documented in a detailed design specification⁴ and is scheduled for implementation throughout all the Superior Court locations in the Commonwealth.

³ Honorable G. Joseph Tauro, since 1970 Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. He was succeeded as Chief Justice of the Superior Court by the Honorable Walter H. McLaughlin.

⁴ Massachusetts Superior Court Case Management System Specifications, B. Kreindel, J. P. Moreschi, R. V. D. Campbell, MTR-2758, The MITRE Corporation, Bedford, Massachusetts, 1973.

The system approach taken by the project team and the resulting Total Information System for the Superior Court can be contrasted with approaches more commonly used in applying "automation" or "data processing" to the problems of a court or of other governmental organizations. Many such organizations take the position that if data processing is needed, it is needed primarily to do an existing job more efficiently. Such organizations view data processing assistance only as a means to handle more transactions with the same resources (personnel), a better means to perform certain activities or an improved method to produce statistics. Seldom do they seek to develop a basic understanding of the court's overall information needs. Focusing their attention on performing one immediately important or pressing function, such courts may employ someone with a computer programming background who understands applications, and direct that person to utilize data processing to do the job. The result is usually the "automation" of the ineffective and many times inappropriate present system. As a consequence, functions may be automated that are no longer necessary, the possible inclusion of relatively simple additional operational tasks may be overlooked and interagency applications are usually ignored. In many such cases, the data elements may be too restrictively defined and the input data, constrained by existing forms and procedures, difficult to acquire. As a result of this approach, outputs may be limited and in a form useful only to those immediately involved in the

function, and the potential for expansion to other operations and functions is usually severely limited.

A second approach taken by courts and other organizations is to bring on-board the "outside expert" to convert the agency to data processing. With little instruction or direction, the expert and his crew is put to work on a data processing solution to a court recognized problem. His effort is restricted by the funding immediately available and his understanding of the real world problems of the court and his interaction with the organization's managers is many times virtually nonexistent. He seldom develops the depth of understanding or the confidence of court employees and management because of the limitations on his available time. The result is often either a hazy concept for information system improvements or a rigid procedural straight jacket for the organization to follow. In neither case is the chance for acceptance and implementation of the system very high, and consequently such an approach often leads only to stacks of study reports gathering dust.

The Total Information System embodied in the CCMS is the product of an orderly process which dealt with all court organizations, functions, and responsibilities. It relates the capture, storage and retrieval of data and information to the operational and management needs of the court.

There have been three steps in the development of the CCMS, each of which represented a discrete system engineering activity and resulted in a documented output. The completed steps include problem identification, conceptual design, and detailed design and system specifications. Subsequent phases will complete system acquisition and implementation.

a. Problem Identification

Although not initially recognized as needed by court management, this phase of problem identification was undertaken in two steps. The Chief Justice, perceiving the symptoms of a general problem, initiated a very limited survey of court operating problems which resulted in the identification of four significant problem areas -- (1) the management and administrative needs of the Office of the Chief Justice, (2) the management of juries, (3) the docket preparation process in the Clerk's Office, and (4) the trial assignment process. The focus of the study was the documentation of these court operating problem areas and included an analysis of court congestion and delay. Its objective was to examine the potential use of modern data processing and other management tools in the Superior Court and to develop and plan for the implementation of effective long-term solutions to the problems of judicial administration through more effective management of resources and improved administrative operations. The methodology for the study included:

in-depth discussions with the Chief Justice, judges, attorneys, clerks, district attorneys, probation officers and other court personnel, a general literature search, extensive field research and operational analysis:

The problem areas were documented⁵ and recommendations were made for immediate and long-term actions which could be taken for their resolution. Action to implement recommendations for improved information flow and management of juries has been taken and the suggested improvements are now operational in the Superior Court.

A second more detailed study of the "Case Disposition Process", which dealt with problems of docket preparation and trial assignment was then undertaken. Following an extensive and detailed analysis of the case handling process, the existing processing of information and the trial assignment process, two major products were produced.⁶ These products included, first, a unique detailed description of the Superior Court criminal case process, including detailed charts of information flows and extensive court operating statistics gathered through interviews, observations and the use of statistical sampling

⁵ Massachusetts Superior Court Management and Administration System Study, M. P. Galin and J. P. Mazzetti, MTR-999, The MITRE Corporation, Bedford, Massachusetts (1970).

⁶ The Superior Court of Massachusetts Management Study, B. Kreindel, J. P. Moreschi, M. P. Galin and D. Turrentine, MTR-2113, The MITRE Corporation, Bedford, Massachusetts (1971).

techniques. This analysis indicated, for example, that although the number of new cases entering the court each year has grown by some 25% since 1968, the undisposed backlog of cases grew by 143% during the same period. A 300% increase (a backlog of some 55,000 cases) has been forecast by the end of 1974. Much of that increase can be attributed to the court's relatively informal case management policies which result in the continuance of five out of every seven court appearances scheduled.

The second major product of the analysis was a detailed listing of suggested improvements in the process by which the court dealt with criminal cases. Among these recommendations was the development of a totally revised court information system. Other recommendations involved court management, case scheduling, personnel and organizational interrelationships. Following a review of these recommendations, Chief Justice McLaughlin made the decision to proceed with the development of the revised information system.

b. Conceptual Design

Based on the in-depth understanding of court operations, court management needs, and of the case handling process developed during the problem identification phase, a new information system concept was devised. It described an improved system for the day-to-day operation and management of the courts' criminal caseload. It was conceived as a computerized on-line information and

communications system providing the court's operating personnel with the records, calendars, notices, dockets and other data required for daily court operation using remote, on-line computer display terminals connected to a central statewide data base and computer. The system concept included many features that were simply impossible to accomplish under the overburdened manual system, such as time of day case scheduling, telephone reschedule capability, automatic production of jail lists, participant notifications for every court appearance, conflict-free scheduled dates, case information for assignment judges including the number of previous continuances, pre-printed data collection forms, and many other operational features.

While providing support to all court operational tasks, the CCMS concept included the utilization of the same operational data base to produce court management reports and statistics. These periodic outputs were designed to alert court management to problems or potential problem areas so that appropriate actions might be taken. Examples of planned court management reports include listings of potential participant conflicts, reports of cases which exceed a predetermined case movement schedule, reports of excessive caseloads for private or public defenders, prosecutors, or courts and many others.

Statistical reports to court management, summarizing various aspects of court operations, will also be provided. In addition to

reports of total caseload, backlog, cases disposed, etc., more sophisticated statistics to aid in policy making at the Chief Justice's level will also be provided. These additional management statistics will include continuance rates and causes; bail levels and default rates, attorney and judge workloads and related continuances, as well as other measures of court activity.

In the conceptual design, the operational and management outputs were identified, the system inputs were defined, and the general data flows and data base structures described.

Following a review of the CCMS concept by court personnel approval was given by the Chief Justice to proceed to the design phase of system development.

c. Detailed Design and System Specification

In order to encourage a competitive bidding environment for the procurement and implementation of the CCMS, a series of specifications for the computer programs, computer and communication hardware and facilities were required. Such specifications define the performance, design, development and test requirements for the system and will be included in the request for proposal package.

Prior to writing specifications, however, it was first necessary to prepare a detailed system design. The concept of the previous phase was expanded; each system output report was completely defined and samples of the reports were prepared; input forms were

similarly designed. All files, segments of files, and data elements were defined and related to both system inputs and outputs. As each of these were prepared, they were reviewed with a team of court operating personnel who provided valuable insights into their utility and acceptability in the court environment. As a result of both the detailed design process itself, and the reviews with court personnel, changes and improvements were made, not only to the detailed design, but in some cases to the concept itself. The resulting specifications⁷ were prepared to allow the broadest range of hardware and software approaches to possible vendors, yet included specific requirements in the areas of performance and physical characteristics, reliability, maintainability, availability, construction, documentation, maintenance and support personnel and training, quality assurance and system interfaces.

d. System Acquisition and Implementation

The final steps in the Total Information System approach will be the procurement of the system's hardware, software, communications and facilities; the installation, test and operation of the system; and the training of its operating personnel. These steps will be accomplished by contractors selected through open competitive bidding based on the specifications prepared during the previous phase. Although the Chief Justice felt that before dissemination the

⁷Massachusetts Superior Court Case Management System Specifications, *ibid.*

system should be comprehensive, complete, and thoroughly tested, the pressing needs of the already overloaded Suffolk County (Boston) Court suggested the following plan. Major functional elements will first be tested in a relatively inactive court. When both data processing and personnel problems have been eliminated, these elements will be introduced into Suffolk County. Meanwhile the next major element will be tested in the smaller court. In this way Suffolk County will benefit from CCMS at the earliest possible time and will not face additional problems caused by introducing an untested system. Following this, CCMS will be expanded to other Superior Courts throughout the state.

System Description

The most important function of the CCMS will be to provide the court's management and operational personnel, at both a local and statewide level, the ability to access a single, coordinated data base of case information (see Figure 2). This capability will be achieved through a system which contains the following major features:

a. Single Point Data Entry via Remote Terminal

All data to be entered in the CCMS will be generated through court appearances or other activities which occur in the county Superior Courts. In eight of the busiest county courts, designated Terminal Access Courts (TAC's), the clerk's and district attorney's offices will have one or more interactive cathode ray tube (CRT) and keyboard terminals connected to a central Judicial Data Processing

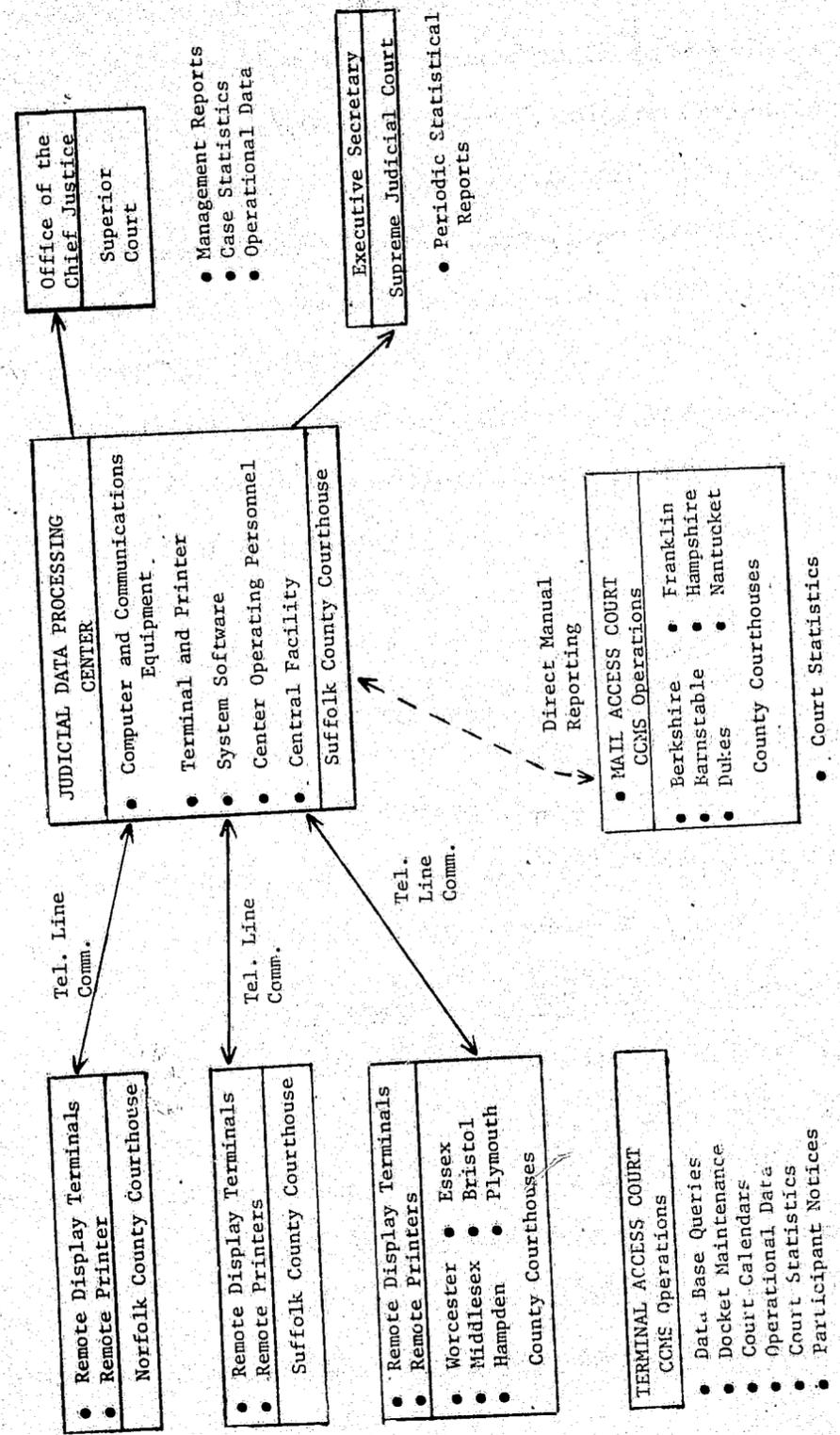


Figure 2 - Overall CCMS System Diagram

Center in Boston. Data on cases, defendants, court appearances, indictments, attorneys, appeals and current status will be entered directly from such locations using the on-line terminals provided. Data on courtroom events will be recorded by the clerk present using data collection forms, some of which will be preprinted with case and defendant information by the system itself. Personnel in the Clerk's Office will then enter the data from the forms into the CCMS data base using formatted displays on the terminals.

In the other six, less busy counties where on-line operation would not be cost effective, courts designated Mailed Access Courts (MAC's) will employ a more traditional manual system and will mail data to the Data Processing Center. That data will be used to produce management and statistical reports, but will not create current operational documents for those courts.

b. Establishment of a Single Data Base

The CCMS will include a single data base containing calendar, docket and participant information for 92% of the active Superior Court felony and misdemeanor appeal cases in the Commonwealth. Uniform and comprehensive statistical information on the activities of the remainder will, in addition, be contained in the central data base. Clerks, Probation Officers, District Attorneys, Judges, Attorneys, Witnesses, Bail Bondsmen, and all court organizations and case participants will, as a result, have a central

source of verified data for their use in processing the criminal caseload of the court. Once criminal case data, concerning an event, court appearance or other transaction (such as bail release, case initiation, arraignment or trial) has been entered into the data base through the remote terminals, it will be available for the variety of daily court requirements for information (see Figure 3).

c. Case, Participant and Criminal Charge Tracking

Each participant in the Superior Court criminal case process, each criminal charge (indictment and/or appeal) and each case unit will be tracked by the system as the case moves from indictment to final disposition.

A case unit, or the aggregation of defendants and charges, which will be tried together as one entity, will be tracked by the system. Such tracking is necessary because the judge and the court generally deal with such a unit at each court appearance, rather than with an individual criminal charge or individual defendant.

Probation and certain prosecution functions, on the other hand, require dealing with individual defendants. Therefore, the CCMS will, in addition, record and track each defendant whose case or cases are before the Superior Court.

Finally, in order to meet the legal record-keeping responsibilities of the Clerk, who must maintain a complete history of the

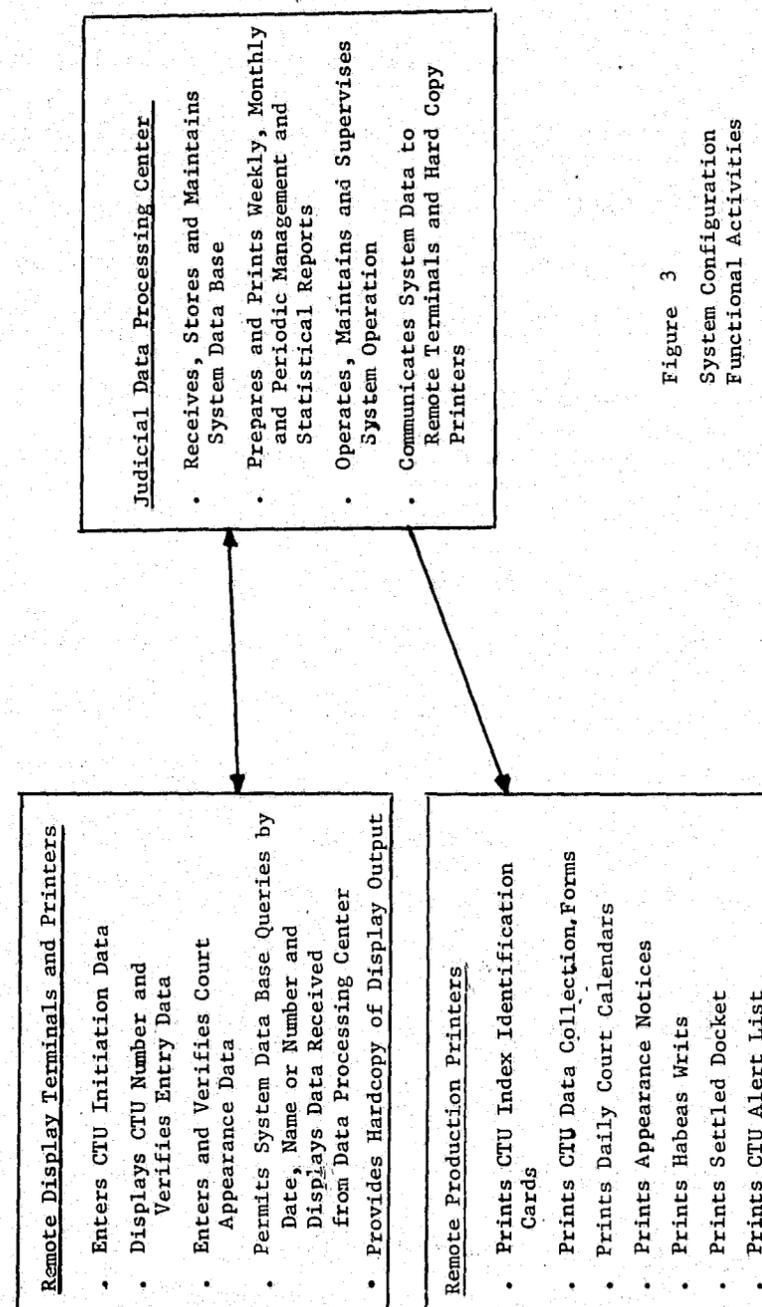


Figure 3
System Configuration
Functional Activities

court activities affecting each separate criminal charge (indictment or appeal), the CCMS will track each such charge throughout its life in the court.

d. Preparation of Operational Reports, Notices and Calendars

The CCMS has been designed to prepare the daily, weekly and monthly reports which are required for effective court operation. Daily calendars, notices of scheduled appearances to all case participants and docket preparation are some of the currently manually prepared documents which will be produced by the CCMS. Other operational documents to be prepared include indictment and defendant index cards, jail transportation lists, probation disposition reports, attorney workload reports, prosecutor assignments and lists of overdue cases. Although many of these reports are produced by the existing manual system, the CCMS will not only provide more accurate and up-to-date reports (since they are all created from a common data base) but many of the system's outputs will contain important new data. Calendars, for example, will be organized by time of day for court appearances, will summarize the number of previous case continuances, and will identify all case participants and charges.

e. Preparation of Management Reports

A central feature of the CCMS will be the preparation of statistical and management reports for the Office of the Chief

Justice, and for management personnel in the district attorney, clerk and probation offices at each county court. Included in such reports will be workload summaries and case backlog reports, listings of potential conflicts among participants scheduled for appearance, case aging reports, default summary reports, and defendant's bail and attorney reports. In addition to these regularly prepared management reports, other reports can be produced on a demand basis by authorized court management personnel. Such "demand" reports may include summaries of indictments/appeals initiated, case profiles, most serious offense and bail at arraignment reports, sentence and disposition summaries, ages of completed cases, identification of drug-related crimes, and other special reports. Such management reports will provide information on problems or potential problems to those persons who can take appropriate action such as the Chief Justice, a local presiding justice, a district attorney, court clerk or the head of the public defenders organization.

f. Remote Query Capability

From its central data base, the CCMS will provide court agencies with timely information regarding cases, participants or future schedules through a remote on-line query capability. With such a comprehensive and up-to-date source of data, court personnel may make inquiries as part of their daily operational processing of

the criminal caseload or in response to inquiries from the public. In addition to the terminals in the clerk's and district attorney's offices, a remote display terminal will also be installed in the central assignment courtroom in each Terminal Access Court so that if necessary, queries can be made during a court appearance. Within the constraints of security and privacy, queries may be made from any of these terminals on cases (indictment, appeal or case unit number), on participants (attorney, defendant, witness) or on dates (calendar for any future date). A hard copy printout of any query response may be secured through printing equipment associated with certain terminals.

g. Privacy and Security Provisions

The design of the CCMS has included provisions for both the physical security of the system's facilities and equipment and for the controlled access to its data base, either for file up-dates or for inquiry. These are accomplished through terminal identification, restrictions of each terminal to specific functions, and operator identification by passwords, authorization keys or identification cards. Privacy of certain CCMS data will be maintained by restricting access to lists of witnesses, and by limiting information on a defendant's cases to only the county Superior Court from which the inquiry is made. Error corrections and other updates to existing data will be strictly controlled and a complete transaction log with both terminal and operator identifiers will be maintained.

Unique Features of the CCMS

The designers of the CCMS feel that several of its features are unique in court information systems. These include the use of the "case trial unit" (CTU) as the basic data focus for the collection and storage of case information, and the coordinated use of remote entry CRT terminals in the busier courts, with the use of mailed data entry, from the less active courts, into a common data base.

a. Case Trial Unit (CTU)

The use of the Case/Trial Unit (CTU) to represent a group of indictments and/or appeals and defendants which will come before the Superior Court for a trial as a group will formalize the present court practice. Arraignments, hearings, trial and dispositions are currently scheduled, rescheduled and managed on such a basis. However, no formal means of identifying the unit now exists. In the CCMS, all defendants, and all charges against those defendants which are expected to go to trial as a group, will be uniquely identified as a CTU.

As a new case enters the court, it will be assigned a self-checking CTU number by the Clerk's Office following the receipt of a CTU initiation authorization form from the Office of the District Attorney. The form will authorize the establishment of the CTU and will identify the defendant(s) and charge(s) involved.

The Clerk will maintain an individual folder for each CTU (see Figure 4), which will contain all of the indictments, complaints, bail bonds, attorney appearance forms, motions and other papers associated with that CTU as well as a copy of the CTU initiation form. Data collection forms containing the results of court appearances, such as hearings, arraignments and trial, and disposition will also be placed in the folder, so that an up-to-date file of all case papers will be available at all times.

Although the CCMS will provide computer-generated index cards for easy cross-reference between a CTU number, the associated indictment and/or appeal number(s), and the name(s), of the defendant(s), the CTU number will be the principal identifier used by the system for the court's calendar, dockets and management and statistical reports.

The number of CTU's awaiting arraignment, trial or disposition will, for the first time, provide the court with an accurate measurement of its criminal caseload. Such a measure will provide not only a better picture of the current backlog, but also provide a basis for projections of future requirements for judicial personnel, facilities and other resources.

The use of the CTU will also eliminate the need for multiple duplicate entries on case papers currently made by the assistant clerks in the courtroom and by docketing personnel in the clerk's

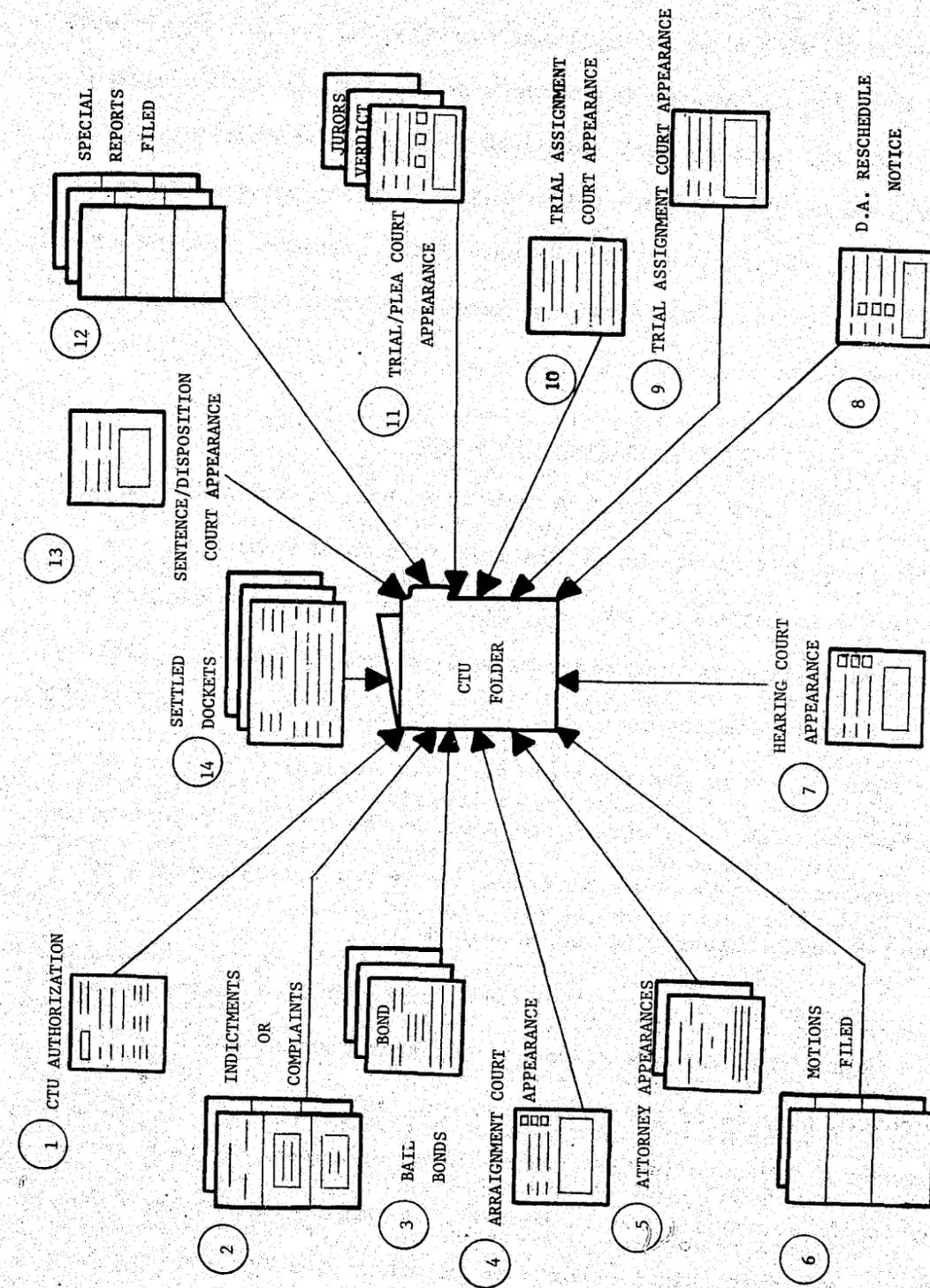


FIGURE 4. CTU FOLDER LIFE CYCLE

office. It will also end the need for grouping of case papers each time a number of related indictments and/or appeals are scheduled for court appearance, followed by their separation in order to file them numerically. The CTU folder will provide a convenient, orderly means of handling papers for the use of the presiding justice and other court personnel, as well as providing a complete backup to the computer files.

b. Coordinated Data from All Courts

The CCMS will provide the Chief Justice and other court managers with much needed statistical information which will be extracted from the central data base. Some of these periodically produced statistics will cover case backlogs, defendants, attorneys, trial results and dispositions, types of offenses, bail, continuances, defaults and other summaries of court activities. These and other statistics will, in addition, be produced to meet the reporting requirements of other governmental agencies for annual reports of total Superior Court criminal caseload.

As a result of an analysis made by the project team, it was determined that the six of county Superior Courts, which in 1972 produced only 8% of the total caseload, do not have sufficient volume of CTU's to justify remote terminal access to the central judicial processing center, however, the management of the Superior Court, and Statistical reports on criminal case activity require

that data be acquired from all courts including these six counties. The design solution used in the CCMS involves these courts as off-line or Mailed Access Courts (MAC's). A collection form will be prepared by court personnel when a CTU is originated, to which more data is added after CTU final disposition. One copy of this form will be mailed to the Judicial Data Processing Center when the case is initiated and another copy when the case is completed. Data will be entered into a MAC data base which will then be used, together with the data entered from the eight terminal access courts (TAC's), to generate integrated monthly and annual statistical reports covering each court and the system as a whole.

Conclusion

The Court Case Management System represents a significant step forward in providing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with the information and operational support required to improve the handling and disposition of criminal cases in the Superior Court. It will be comprised of a central data processing facility including computer, communications hardware, and system software; remote data terminals located in eight terminal access courts; mail access courts in six counties submitting and receiving data from and to the central data processing operation in a manual mode; telecommunications to provide for interactive operation of the remote data terminals; computer

programs and documentation; a trained and capable staff; and the necessary facilities for system operation.

The CCMS design is a Total Information System and is the result of a deliberate, orderly process which addressed the statewide needs of the Massachusetts Superior Court and provided a carefully considered solution tailored to meet those needs.

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