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COURT MICROFILMING

FINAL REPORT

NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

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COURT MICROFILMING

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. The court microfilming project is a continuation of efforts by the Philadelphia courts to microfilm data from several agencies of the criminal justice system. The purpose of the endeavor is to:

- (1) reclaim floor space for needed activities;
- (2) provide an efficient information retrieval system;
- (3) distribute, when needed, copies of these records to associated agencies;
- (4) increase document security through the creation of duplicate records and storage of microfilmed data.

It offers these services for the Court of Common Pleas criminal records, the Court of Common Pleas civil records, the pre-trial services division, the Municipal Court of Philadelphia, and the Probation Department.

Although these agencies have somewhat differing requirements, the process of microfilm data reduction is similar for all. The initial step involves selection and preparation of the appropriate documents by "the screeners." These documents are submitted to the microfilm technicians, who film, process, proof, and duplicate the material. The microfilmed data are indexed according to the respective system and, then, distributed to the appropriate agencies.

For the Court of Common Pleas criminal files only the true bills of indictment are microfilmed. These contain information on the participants in the trial and recommendations (such as request for psychiatric examination) that may have been made by criminal justice system agencies involved with the case. For the Municipal Court criminal files only the transcripts are microfilmed; these display the information on trial participants and trial dispositions.

B. The evaluation of the project was accomplished through structured and unstructured interviews with court and project administrators, project technicians and screeners, users of microfilmed data within the court system, and independent lawyers. In addition the evaluators conducted on-site visits to the microfilm studio and the criminal information desk in City Hall. Further they examined the legibility, completeness, and indexing of the microfilmed data.

C. The project offers a very valuable service to the criminal justice system. The data microfilmed from each agency are indicated below. Information is included on the number of years covered and on the number of reels, cases and images processed.

I. Court of Common Pleas, Criminal Records

Period 1965 to July 1967 (complete)
July 1967 to December 1967 (incomplete)
1968 (complete)
1969 (95% complete)
1970 to 1976 (incomplete)

No. of Reels	178
No. of Cases	236,111
No. of Images	243,032

D. The major recommendation is repeated from last year. It deals with the need for the protection of records which may be, and sometimes are, defined as confidential. It is hoped that the increased availability of data facilitated by microfilming will generate an increased concern for the misuse of data.

E. The project anticipates a grant modification to enable it to purchase two (2) 16 mm. film boxes which are removable from camera; to be used with existing equipment model F77-23/2. Approximate cost \$600.00 each. To replace D420 (1) Microfiche Reader-Printer, and (4) Microfiche Portable Readers. Total costs: \$1,423.00.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Original Goals and Objectives of the Project:

The Court Microfilming Project was established to reduce data storage requirements, provide an efficient information retrieval system, and insure document security through the microfilming of data. It is intended to provide these services for the following administrative units: Common Pleas Court's Criminal Records, Common Pleas Court Civil Dockets, Probation Department Files, Pre-trial Services Division Bail Records, Municipal Court Criminal Records.

A. Common Pleas Court Criminal Records:

Bills of Indictment of disposed cases are prepared for microfilming by screening clerks. The process involves examining the documents, and, if necessary, transferring information pertaining to the disposition of the case. These records are then sent to the microfilm technicians who photograph them and later develop, verify, edit, duplicate and distribute the film.

The microfilm reels are duplicated three times:

- (1) two duplications are placed into 16 mm. cartridges, of which one is sent to Police Headquarters and the other is sent to a Records Center of the Court of Common Pleas in City Hall;
- (2) the remaining duplicate film is retained in the microfilming office;
- (3) the master film is forwarded for underground storage.

Access to information on the films is accomplished through a computer indexing system with terminals in, among other places, the City Hall court records office. The appropriate film reference number may be ascertained through knowledge of a person's name, police no., case no., or microfilm number. Once the required microfilm cartridge is located, it is placed upon the reader-printer machine by one of the clerks in the Records Center. The

information can either be read directly off the screen, or hard copy prints may be requested. Our tests show that the entire retrieval time is under three minutes providing the computer terminal is operational.

The files from the Court of Common Pleas (criminal) are under the charge of the Clerk of the Court of Quarter Sessions. These files, including the bill of indictment and any other material of the case, are returned, after microfilming, to his control. As of this time, the Clerk has not destroyed the files after they are microfilmed. The reasons for this are twofold: One, he is obliged by law to keep these files for a specific number of years (15 to 25 years, depending on the type of case); and two, because only the bill of indictment is microfilmed, there is a possibility that additional material from the files will be required.

Specific data on the number of records and weekly filming rates for this and other areas will be found in Section IV, "Project Results and Analysis."

B. Common Pleas Court Civil Records

The project continues to film civil records of the Court of Common Pleas. Over the past few years the work of the project in this area especially has enabled the City's administrators to utilize necessary space within City Hall that was previously devoted to record storage. The process of photographing and film processing is similar to that explained above (Section A). Of course a different camera is employed to film these records.

C. Probation Department Files

Far more material than is requested by the Courts is required for these microfiles. They include, in addition to all legal, medical, and psychiatric records, the reports of all probation officers.

The current system allows Probation Officers and other qualified personnel to view the records on the three readers available at the Probation Department offices. Further, paper prints can be obtained from two of the three machines.

D. Pre-trial Division Services Bail Records

The purpose of microfilming for this agency is to film expired bail interviews and destroy the originals. Although the amount of material in each case is variable, the trend is toward increasing information in each file. Thus, time and number of images required by camera operators for each case has increased substantially.

E. Municipal Court Criminal Records

This is the first year that Municipal Court records are being filmed. Although intended as part of the original proposal (1973), procedural and legal issues prevented filming previously. Now, questions concerning material appropriate for filming have been resolved and a viable indexing system has been developed. The transcript from each case is being microfilmed.

III. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

The evaluation consisted of structured and unstructured interviews with court personnel, court records personnel, microfilm technicians, file screeners and independent lawyers who use the system. In addition, we conducted on-site visits to the microfilm users' room and the microfilm processing rooms. We also tested the system's retrieval capabilities and the quality of the reader and printer machines.

To ensure the most efficacious data collection, we developed two specific interview schedules and two observational rating cards. The first, "The Microfilm User Interview Schedule," (see Appendix I) deals with the utility of the microfilm system, its completeness, safety, problems, and adaptability.

The second interview schedule, administered to "Microfilm Technicians and File Screeners," (see Appendix II) was designed for those involved with the mechanics of the projects operation. It includes, in addition to questions on the worker's activities and perceptions, a series of probe areas on

suggestions for improvement of the operation and administration.

The "File Sample Rating Card" (see Appendix III) is essentially a checklist of criteria for evaluating the microfilmed data. It requests information on the legibility, completeness, waiting time, and indexing of the files. We used this form in both our own observations of the microfilmed records and in our questioning of other users.

The "Observation Card" (see Appendix IV) is also a checklist, but more general than that of the file rating procedure. Here, we are looking for any needed improvements in the physical arrangements of the facilities: are people waiting for the reader/printer; how are the films stored and how safe are they; who uses the system; and, is it available to all who need it?

Lastly, we have requested and received statistical data on the total number of cases, images, and reels in addition to the weekly average for all activities subsumed under the project's purview.

In all our interviews and visits, the staff and administrators were cooperative and helpful.

IV. PROJECT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The project has been successful in meeting its objectives. It continues to reduce large amounts of cumbersome data, provide access to this information and reclaim floor space for court and agency activities. Further, the individuals involved in the administration and operation of the project appear to be seriously concerned with its efficiency and cost.

Several factors affect the production rate of the screening clerks and microfilm technicians. Many of these are outside the control of the project. Screeners, for instance, can only prepare documents as they are provided by the agencies, and recent alterations and relocations of the project's staff and facilities have adversely affected the rates.

As noted, however, the number of documents processed is only one of the benefits provided by the project. The information retrieval system made possible by the microfilm is vastly more efficient in time and personnel than the previous methods, and the security of the data (in terms of protection against destruction) is almost immeasurable.

A. Statistical Data

The data microfilmed from each agency are indicated below. Information is included on the number of years covered and on the number of reels, cases and images processed.

1. Court of Common Pleas, Criminal Records

Period 1965 to July 1967 (complete)
 July 1967 to December 1967 (incomplete)
 1968 (complete)
 1969 (95 percent complete)
 1970 to 1976 (incomplete)

No. of Reels 178
 No. of Cases 236,111
 No. of Images 243,032

2. Municipal Court, Criminal Records

Period 1975 (75 percent complete)

No. of Reels 27
 No. of Cases 50,600
 No. of Images 55,160

3. Probation Department

Period Female Records 1936 to 1965 (complete)
 Pre-sentence Files 1973 to 1974 (complete), 1966 (incomplete)
 Correspondence Files 1930 to 1946 (complete)
 Male Probation Records 1914 to 1965 (complete)
 Combined Male and Female Records 1966 (incomplete)

No. of Reels 406
 No. of Cases 106,488
 No. of Images 916,392

4. Pre-trial Services Division

Period 1971 to 1973 (complete)
 1974 (incomplete)

No. of Reels 261
 No. of Cases 57,582
 No. of Images 520,500

5. Court of Common Pleas, Civil Dockets

Period 1874 to 1959 (complete)
 1960 (incomplete)

No. of Reels	2,962
No. of Dockets	11,399
No. of Images	1,488,746

Total

No. of Reels	3,834
No. of Cases	450,781
No. of Dockets	11,399
No. of Images	3,223,830

(Data from June 1976)

B. Costs and Budget Analysis

The Court microfilm project is funded for an eleven and one-half month period from July 21, 1975 through June 1976. Total costs are \$85,730 of which \$58,839 are provided by Federal funds. The State buy-in equals \$3,923.

Because all of the major equipment was purchased previously, the bulk of expenses incurred by the project have been for personnel.

Of the four full-time clerical assistants, two receive \$9,021 per annum and two receive \$8,466 per annum. The part-time assistant receives \$2.50 per hour. All clerical assistants work as screeners.

Four of the five microfilm technicians/camera operators receive an annual salary of \$10,899. The fifth individual receives \$10,493.

The screening supervisor and project supervisor are paid \$15,000 and \$13,000 per annum, respectively.

The project purchased two microfilm readers (as recommended in last year's evaluation) at the cost of \$1,100 each. It also ordered one microfiche reader-printer (cost @\$995) and four portable microfiche readers (cost @\$107). Supplies (film and processing chemicals) cost \$1,975.

Calculation of cost per image of microfilmed documents is available by dividing the weekly totals of microfilmed images into the project's weekly budget

(including a proportion of the general expenses). The resultant figure, however, is meaningless because it does not reflect the different types of preparation, equipment utilization, and retrieval modes for each area/agency. Moreover, it does not indicate the saving in storage space and users' retrieval time or the benefits of document security.

C. E.E.O.C. Data

The Court Microfilming Project is part of the "Court Administration Personnel Regulation No. 1 - Merit System Implementation" plan of the City of Philadelphia. Thus, although the project employs only twelve workers the project's hiring policies are determined by the City's and the Court's Equal Employment Opportunity plan.

An analysis of occupational positions in relation to sex and race, however, reveals a division of labor stratified by these categories. The five camera operator/technicians are white males. Four of the five clerical screeners are female; two of the women are black, two are white. The one male screener is black. Both the screening supervisor and the project supervisor are white males.

There have been no promotions, no disciplinary actions, and no firings during the period of the grant. Therefore, no analysis is possible in relation to these actions.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project is fulfilling a valuable service to the criminal justice community of Philadelphia. The staff and administrators appear knowledgeable about the activities and uses of the project's efforts. All aspects of the project are run with a concern for cost and speed. The project's objectives are being realized.

A. Recommendations

1. In our evaluation two years ago we noted that there was no definitive opinion as to the legal necessity of maintaining documents after they had been microfilmed and as to the admissibility of microfilmed data in court. Last year, in response to that recommendation the court administration researched the question and determined the appropriate regulations. Now we again suggest that the administration implement the policies indicated by these regulations. This includes (a) the destruction of records when replaced by microfilmed data and (b) developing precedents for the use of microfilmed data in the courts.
2. Guidelines for the protection of records are still not established. Nor are the methods for the enforcement of confidentiality safeguards. Those in charge of keeping records work within vague boundaries. We appreciate the dilemmas faced by these individuals. On the one hand they must make data available to agencies and persons who have the need and the right to know. On the other, they must ensure that unauthorized persons be prohibited from gaining access to the records. In addition, there is another class of documents that are considered public record and must be made as accessible as possible.

All this must be accomplished without bureaucratic obfuscation-- which protects the bureaucrat rather than the people being served.

The personnel at the court microfilm project seem cognizant of these concerns. It is essential that they remain appraised of the latest confidentiality guidelines and that they actively work to protect the civil rights of the people whose records they hold.

Bills of indictment contain information on arrests for crimes for which the individual may have been adjudicated innocent. These documents are nevertheless available to anyone via the microfilm retrieval system in City Hall. If arrest records for "unconvicted" crimes are to be restricted to certain authorities or the individual involved (and his/her counsel) then the system is making available information that should be confidential.

In a similar fashion, the increased number of copies facilitated by the microfilm system (e.g., the police get a copy, there is an extra copy in the microfilm processing rooms, and a copy is available from the underground storage facility) makes the dissemination of information even more difficult to control. Extra copies of these data increase the possibilities of a violation of confidentiality. While this is an inevitable cost associated with faster retrieval and increased availability, we must be even more concerned with the protection of confidentiality.

3. Because the administrators of the court microfilming project are familiar with handling large amounts of data, they appear to have a sophisticated approach toward data reduction and data retrieval. We, again, recommend that they be given leadership positions in the City's data handling committees.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
MICROFILM TECHNICIANS AND FILE SCREENERS

1. Position (Function) _____
2. What do you see as the major benefits of this microfilm system?

What are its major problems?

3. What are the major problems you encounter (if different from above)?
4. On what basis is information included in the microfilmed files?
Who makes the decisions? Why?

5. What suggestions might you have to improve your job and/or the system?

Probe areas:

training

machines

personnel

guidelines

FILE SAMPLE: RATING CARD

1. Agency: Data Request

Municipal Court _____
Court of Common Pleas _____
Probation Department _____
Other _____

2. Time:

a) time required to find entry in index:

b) time required to find file:

c) time required to have readable file (i.e. on machine):

3. Legibility:

Excellent _____
Good _____
Adequate _____
Poor _____
Unacceptable _____

4. Completeness:

a) does it have data required by agency?

b) does it have data required by all agencies in study?

5. For those files that have old files available:

a) is everything included in microfilm file?

b) if not, what has been excluded and on what bases (if any)
has this information been omitted?

6. Is the index entry appropriate for this file? Is there cross-indexing?

OBSERVATION CARD

1. Agency:

Municipal Court _____
Court of Common Pleas _____
Probation Department _____
Other _____

2. Location (e.g. department, floor, etc) _____

3. Date and Time: _____

4. Who is using the microfilm system?

5. Are there any queues?

For what:

a) readers:

b) supervisory personnel:

c) other:

6. What safeguards against misuse of data exist?

7. Other comments:

Note: Particularly efficient or inefficient procedures

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
MICROFILM USER

1. Agency:

Municipal Court _____
Court of Common Pleas _____
Probation Department _____
Other (please state) _____

2. Interviewee's position (state function if required) _____

3. Do you use the microfilm records and what do you use them for? (e.g. what kinds of data)

4. If you used the records system before microfilming was introduced, what do you see as the advantages and/or disadvantages of the new system?

a) Time: efficient/inefficient-

b) Completeness of included information-

c) (1) uniformity-

c) other comments:

*FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THE OLD SYSTEM,
CHECK HERE, AND ANSWER ABOVE QUESTIONS

5. Do you know:

a) How much (e.g. for what years or periods) has been microfilmed to date?

b) How much this year

c)

6. How much space has been freed-up this year.
7. What safeguards exist against:
 - a) unauthorized use (reproduction and distribution);
 - b) unauthorized destruction.
8. What safeguards exist against misuse when you send out a microfilmed file, e.g. to another agency, etc.?
9. What guidelines are used for including material in a file (screening guidelines)?
10. Do the microfilmed records meet your information needs? Probe...
11. Are there any problems, or could you foresee any problems, about the inaccessability of a file that is in the process of being microfilmed?
12. How does the indexing system work? Is there any cross-indexing? What would you do, for instance, about name changes (i.e. changes of marital status)?

13. What coordination dealing with microfilming exists between your agency and others? How could this be improved?

14. What can you suggest to improve this system?

a) machinery

b) procedures

c) training

d) personnel

END