



PROTHONOTARY OF BERKS COUNTY
Jonathan K. Del Collo, Prothonotary

HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED
IN THE PROTHONOTARY OFFICE IN 2019

1. IMAGING OF IMPORTANT GENEALOGICAL AND HISTORICAL RECORDS
CONTINUES

I am very proud to report that 352,510 pages of genealogical and historical records were digitized in 2019! It is wonderful knowing that these records, which are all in the new archivally preferred “PDF/A” format, will be preserved forever. The breakdown by record type is as follows:

- **Naturalization Records** – These are our most frequently requested and researched records, especially by genealogists. In 2019, a total of **21,035** pages of naturalization records were digitized. **ALL Berks County Naturalization Records up to June 3, 1930 have now been digitized! We are currently digitizing Naturalization Records from June 3, 1930 and this work is projected to be completed in 2020.**
- **Historical Prothonotary Records** – These are our oldest and most vulnerable records. They are also very historically significant. In 2019, a total of **331,475** pages of historical records were digitized. **About 95% of ALL of our records from 1752 – 1900 are now imaged!** This is a major accomplishment, but our work is not done! Digitization of our historical records continues in 2020.

2. 2018 STAFF REDUCTION THROUGH ATTRITION CONTINUES TO SAVE BERKS TAXPAYERS MONEY IN 2019!

In 2018, my management team and I created efficiencies by cross-training our staff. As a result, **3 ½ Prothonotary staff positions were eliminated through attrition.** This decision created a savings of **\$179,265** in 2019. **\$186,134** will be saved in 2020. The combined savings to Berks taxpayers for 2018 and 2019 was **\$236,923**.

3. WE LAUNCHED OUR NEW MOBILE APP!

One of my goals when I was elected Prothonotary was to use technology to communicate with as many Berks County citizens and customers of our office as possible. Our new mobile application, launched in June 2019, allows customers, researchers and genealogists to access mostly everything our office has to offer. The app is available for free in the Apple App Store (for Apple users) and the Google Play Store (for Android users).

Users can utilize our app to access general office information, search dockets, search historical and naturalization records, access our e-filing system, set up passport appointments, request historical records, schedule research appointments and more! Users can also send a message directly to me through our app.

Our app includes push notifications as well as links to our other social media platforms on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Our app and social media platforms will ensure that all Berks Countians and customers of our office will be able to stay up to date with the very latest information from us. If you haven't already, please download our app today!

Download our app today!

Search: Berks County Prothonotary



4. HISTORICAL IMAGES GALLERY

Berks County has a rich history and our Berks County Courthouse is one of the great historical structures in downtown Reading. I wanted to inject some local history about Reading, Berks County and our Courthouse into the 2nd Floor of the Courthouse where our office is located. There were too many empty walls! So, my management team and I worked with the Berks History Center to select some iconic images of downtown Reading along with images of our Courthouse and the former Courthouse that stood on the footprint of our current Courthouse. We had these images enlarged into large prints, framed and hung throughout the 2nd Floor.

We also researched and wrote captions for each photo, so visitors learn more about the images they are viewing. The resulting **Prothonotary Historical Images Gallery** has been very well received by visitors to the Courthouse. Judges, court personnel and other county employees have also expressed how much they like and appreciate the images. We invite everyone to visit the gallery whenever the Courthouse is open.

5. FRANKLIN BOND DISCOVERED AND BEING PRESERVED!

In May 2019, while sorting through some old records stored in a sub-basement of our office, I uncovered an old bond from 1764. The bond was given by John Womelsdorf of Tulpehocken Township, a blacksmith, to guarantee payment of debt to one Nicholas Kinser. The unique characteristic of this bond is that it was printed by the one and only ***Benjamin Franklin*** and his printing press business partner, David Hall, in Philadelphia. The fact that this bond, after rolling off the printing press, most likely passed through the Founding Father's hands, is simply amazing!

However, after 255 years the bond was in poor condition. I began researching a way to get this bond preserved so that it would be around for another 255 years. In July 2019 I brought the bond back to its birthplace in Philadelphia to the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), one of the preeminent conservatories in the United States, to see if the bond could be preserved. CCAHA provided me with a condition report and proposed treatment plan to preserve the bond. I brought this proposal to the Berks County Records Improvement Committee, which allocated funds to treat and preserve the bond forever. Treatment was begun in December 2019 and will be completed in 2020.

6. REMODELING OF THE PROTHONOTARY OFFICE

Shelving from our back file rooms was removed and re-purposed to other County departments. Also, several portions of the file rooms where the shelving stood were carpeted. Other parts of the Office were painted and prepped for the more extensive remodeling work that will be performed in 2020.

7. "COUNTY CONNECTION" BCTV SHOWS

I was very happy to host the Berks Community Television (BCTV) program, "County Connection" 3 times in 2019. Hosting the show provided a great opportunity to showcase our office, including discussing what our office does, the historical records we have to offer researchers and our new mobile app.