

HEARSAY AMERICA

250

GENESEE COUNTY CIRCUIT AND PROBATE COURTS E-NEWSLETTER

a quarterly publication

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★ ★ ★ SAVE THE DATE (PAGE 5) ★ ★ ★

1776 – IT'S COMPLICATED

What do you really know about how our country came to be? The common answer would certainly include leaving England for religious freedom. It might also suggest a level of coordination of purpose and plan. When boats arrived, was only implementation left to accomplish? You might be mostly wrong.

In the 1600's and 1700's Europeans came to North America for economic opportunity, religious freedom and political liberty. 13 colonies were created on the east coast of the continent. The colonies would later become the first 13 states.

Each colony had its own government, all still controlled by the British King. By the late 1770's, this lack of total self-governance was wearing thin. They were still taxed heavily by the King, not really reaping any benefit and had no say in how the taxes were spent. They were also required to let the British soldiers sleep and eat in their homes.

In 1774, representatives from the colonies met in Philadelphia to discuss the British laws that they thought were the most unfair. Not being treated as equal citizens, separated by the ocean and the fresh air of freedom, the future was taking hold.

In 1775, colonists fought the British army in Massachusetts. The Philadelphia group met again and decided to organize an army with

George Washington as the commander in chief of that army.

In 1776, they met yet again and reached an agreement that the colonies should be free and independent states. Thomas Jefferson was asked to scribe the document. The Declaration of Independence would promise 3 things that no government could take away: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. It was adopted on July 4, 1776.

Of the 56 signers, representing the 13 colonies, most signed on July 4, 1776. Some delegates signed later on the engrossed parchment copy on August 2, 1776.

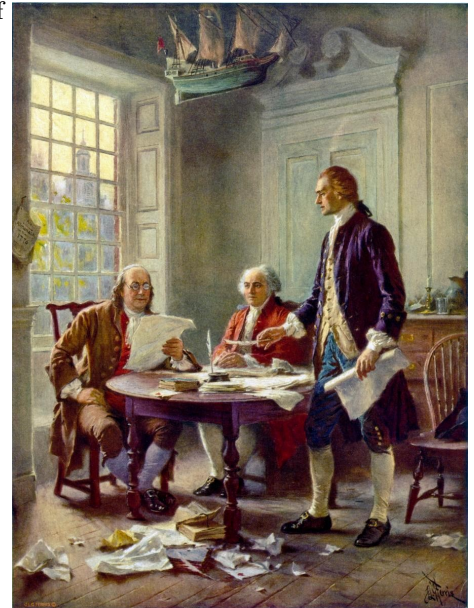
John Hancock signed first, with the largest signature. Other signers from Massachusetts included John and Samuel Adams.

Benjamin Franklin signed from Pennsylvania, along with eight others.

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author, signed for Virginia, along with 6 others.

The remaining colonies to sign were New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The Articles of Confederation were adopted by the Continental Congress in 1777, the first constitution. It would remain in effect until the present-day constitution was enacted in 1789.



Thomas Jefferson: a bit about the scribe.

He was born in Virginia in 1743 and died on the 4th of July 1826. His education included attending the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. After 3 years, he decided to read the law under lawyer George Wythe, one of the preeminent lawyers in the American Colonies. There were no law schools at this time and reading the law under the supervision of an established law-

(Continued on page 15)

THE CHIEF SPEAKS

Homer Simpson once raised a glass and said, “To alcohol! The cause of, and solution to, all of life’s problems.” In too many criminal cases, guns play the same role.

In communities like Flint, which carry serious socioeconomic wounds, the prevalence of guns becomes both the cause of danger and the proposed solution to that same danger. When everyone fears that everyone else may have a gun, even those who would rather not carry one may feel they have to. That choice can be rational at the individual level; but when enough people make the same rational choice, the result is collective irrationality. Everyone arms himself because everyone else might be armed; then everyone else really is armed—the fear proves itself true. I call this the Gunundrum.

The Gunundrum does not just change how violence happens. It also affects how violence is judged afterward when the case lands in our courthouse as a murder trial. Specifically, it warps the justice system by affecting two of the most common defenses in murder cases: SDDOO and SODDI.

SDDOO is self-defense or defense of others. In a gun-saturated environment like Flint, a shooter’s claim of fear is not abstract. Fear may be reasonable because guns are everywhere. But if every shooting were justified by generalized fear, self-defense would cease to be a doctrine of necessity and become a license for private violence. We would be living in the Wild West. That is why the Gunundrum poses a special challenge for judges and juries applying the honest-



and-reasonable-belief standard and the requirement of proportional response. Although law decides whether fear was justified, the evidence is often saturated with Gunundrum fear. We all know how these cases look in trial. The focus is often on the victim himself—he was violent, known to carry a gun, or “going to kill me, so I got him first”—or on his action at the crucial moment: “I couldn’t see his hands,” or “he was reaching.” The gun was either found on or near the victim, or it may have disappeared in the chaos or aftermath.

SODDI stands for “some other dude did it,” which means the issue is identification. When identification relies on *res gestae* witnesses, those witnesses may be scared of the same gun violence that produced the murder itself. They live in the

same community as the defendant, the victim, and their associates. The defendant may be jailed, but his friends are not, and they may have guns. While the court can compel attendance, it cannot guarantee permanent safety, and the witness must return to the same environment. And so the very gunfire that makes the witness important also teaches the witness why involvement may be dangerous. This fear can cause silence, recantation, memory loss and avoidance. Many murder cases either cannot go forward or do not result in a conviction for this reason.

So the shooter says: “I had to fire because he may have had a gun”; while the witness says: “I cannot speak because they may have guns.” That is the Gunundrum—the guns that make shooters afraid to wait and witnesses afraid to speak result in

(Continued on page 15)

COURT ADMINISTRATOR CORNER

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE COURT IT DIRECTOR

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, marking a defining moment in American history.

However, the news did not travel instantly. In 1776, information moved at the speed of the horse, ship, and printed page. The Declaration had to be printed, carried by riders, transported by ships, and shared from town to town, often being read aloud at public gatherings near churches and courthouses.

Compare that to today, when information can travel around the world in seconds. A court announcement, emergency closure notice, or public update can be posted online and viewed almost immediately. Websites, email, smartphones, and social media have transformed how courts communicate with the public.

This change has created both opportunities and responsibilities for the judicial system. The public now expects timely access to accurate information, whether it involves court

schedules, procedural changes, or important announcements. Courts can reach more people, more quickly, than ever before. The journey from horseback riders carrying news of independence to digital notifications reaching thousands of people in moments reflects more than technological progress. It shows how expectations have changed.

Modern courts are not only places where justice is administered, they are trusted sources of infor-

mation that connect communities to the justice system.

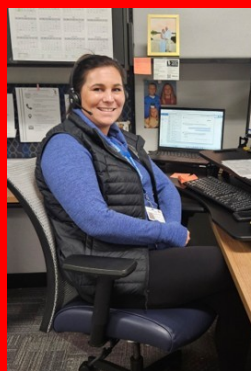
Visit 7thcircuitcourt.com for ways to stay informed and connected. —dc



COURT TALENT



Alisha Curtiss



Cassandra Warson

We are pleased to introduce and warmly welcome several new additions to our court staff.

FOC

Lolita Compton is a FOC Specialist I in the bookkeeping department. She was previously employed at the Genesee County Health Department.

Alisha Curtiss is a FOC Specialist I in the customer service area of the Friend of the Court. Alisha previously worked in the insurance industry.

Zetter Slappy is a Friend of the Court caseworker. Before coming to FOC, Zetter worked in probation at the 67th District Court and also served a term with the State of Michigan Civil Rights Division as an investigator.

Angela Troshak is a FOC Specialist I in the modification department. Before coming to FOC, Angela worked in the clerk's office at the 67th District Court.

Cassandra Warson is a Friend of the Court Specialist I in the customer service area. Cassandra worked at Consumers Energy before joining the FOC.

Jacob Wojtkowicz is an Attorney Referee with the Friend of the Court. Jacob previously was a full-time family law practitioner.

Circuit

Annette Swain is a Public Engagement Specialist in the Legal Records Division of the Circuit Court.

Probate

Andrew Isshak is the Judicial Law Clerk for Judge Ariana Heath. -js



Left to right: Zetter Slappy, Angela Troshak, Lolita Compton, Jacob Wojtkowicz



Left to right: Annette Swain, Andrew Isshak



- On June 10, 2026, LRC Director Rachel Hawrylo attended the Genesee County Health and Resource Fair to represent the Legal Resource Center and connect with community members.

She shared information about LRC services, answered questions about court resources, and highlighted the role of the center in improving access to justice for self-represented individuals.



- Jury trials increased 50% in 2025 over 2024. 2026 is trending even higher.



- The Courthouse will be receiving security upgrades in the next few weeks. New access cards will be involved and new door access points.

McCree Bldg. is also involved with similar upgrades.

- Specialty Courts Staff and contractors attended the 2026 Annual Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals Conference in May.

So far this year, there have been 35 successful graduates and 51 people admitted to the programs since January 1st. We hope to continue to see successful graduates from our programs throughout the rest of the year!



LAW DAY

Law Day was May 1, 2026. The Genesee County Bar Association partnered with the Genesee County Circuit and Probate Courts for the event.

High school mock trials resumed after a hiatus during COVID, with 4 schools participating. The schools were Powers, Lake Fenton, Flint Cultural Center Academy and International Academy of Flint. Judge Mark Latchana and Judge Ariana Heath were the presiding judges for the presentations.

Following the mock trials, the students were provided

with lunch at *The Tower* and heard remarks from Do-monique Clemons, Genesee County Clerk-Register, Dale Weighill, Genesee County Board Chair, Judge David J. Newblatt, Chief Judge - Genesee County Circuit and Probate Courts and Judge Duncan M. Beagle, retired Circuit Judge and President of the Genesee County Bar Foundation.

Genesee County Bar Association President Elias Fanous served as master of ceremonies.

The oversized screen at *The Tower* entrance featured the

names of the high schools, welcomed the students to their county administration building and to the event.

It was an overwhelming success and sure to be bigger and better next year.

The Law Day coloring contest also returned in 2026. The schools participating were International Academy of Flint and Richfield Public School Academy. Over 100 submissions were received and displayed on the first floor of the Courthouse. The 2nd and 3rd grade winners are

noted below. All students received a certificate of appreciation and the winners received a \$25 gift card from the Genesee County Bar Association.

If you have a high school student or know a teacher that would like to be involved in mock trials next year, send them to the Genesee County Bar Association, Tatilia Burroughs, Executive Director, 315 E. Court Street, Flint, MI 48502, (810) 232-6000 ext. 101, tyb@gcbalaw.org –bam



Genesee County Bar Association
Law Day 2026
The Rule of Law and the American Dream

2nd grade winner



Genesee County Bar Association
Law Day 2026
The Rule of Law and the American Dream

3rd grade winner



The Historic Genesee County Courthouse Centennial Celebration

**900 South Saginaw Street
Flint, MI 48502**

SAVE THE DATE

Friday, September 25, 2026

12:00-1:00 Unveiling and Dedication of public art
1:00-2:30 Tours of original courtrooms
2:30-4:00 Greater Flint Arts Council Reception

Sponsored by Genesee Bar Foundation, with support from the Judge Louis B. and Barbara H. McGregor Trust Fund, Courthouse Restoration Fund, Genesee County and Genesee County Historical Society

HUAC



67th District
Court Judge Mark
C. McCabe writes
"Ask the Judge"
for the *Tri-County
Times*.

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) will appear in an upcoming addition.

Dating back to the Revolutionary War, our country has always been vigilant in identifying spies and groups who could do us harm.

An example was in 1780 when Brigadier General Benedict Arnold was discovered to be a British spy.

To this day, his name is synonymous with being a traitor.

In the 20th Century there was increased concern about foreign ideology infiltrating the United States.

Congress became involved with successive committees investigating individuals or groups who were disloyal or subversive.

Examples include the 1918-1919 Overman Committee investigating German and Russian Bolshevik elements in the United States.

The 1930 Fish Committee investigating communist activities.

The 1934-1937 McCormack-Dickstein Committee investigating Nazi and other propaganda activities.

Based upon the work of these previous committees, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in 1938, to investigate communists in positions of actual or supposed influence in United States society.

Several other committees had the same missions.

The fear of communism was great, and in 1947 subpoenas were issued to 43 people in the entertainment industry to testify before HUAC.

The first question was "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the communist party?"

The second was "Do you know any communists?"

Failing to answer could result in being held in contempt of Congress.

Among those subpoenaed, ten refused to testify, resulting in their being blacklisted from employment (called the "Hollywood Ten"), and being convicted of contempt of Congress.

Ultimately there were some 500 hundred entertainment industry artists who were boycotted by the studios, and their careers damaged or ended.

Many non-Hollywood individuals suffered the same fate.

There were some successful investigations such as notorious communist spies Whittaker Chambers and Alfred Hiss being prosecuted and imprisoned.

HUAC eventually grew out of favor as the fear of communism declined and respect for it lessened.

An example is the October 3, 1968, congressional appearance of Jerry Rubin, a member of the radical Youth International Party or YIPPIES, dressed in a Revolutionary War uniform, claiming to be a descendant of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, and blowing soap bubbles as he was questioned.

HUAC changed its name in 1969 and ended in 1975, becoming part of another House committee.

Be it good or bad, HUAC is now a part of our history.



INDEPENDENCE THEN, JUSTICE TODAY

As the United States prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it is a good time to reflect on the values our country was founded on: liberty, equality, independence, and the belief that every person deserves a voice. While the world looks very different than it did in 1776, those ideas still matter today, especially when it comes to access to justice.

The Declaration of Independ-

ence centered on the idea that people should have the ability to stand up for their rights and participate fully in society. Today, that idea connects closely to helping people understand and navigate the legal system. For many individuals, the court process can feel confusing, intimidating, and out of reach. Creating better access to legal information and court resources helps people feel more confident, informed, and independent when dealing with important legal issues

affecting their lives and families.

At the Genesee County Legal Resource Center, the goal is to help break down barriers that can prevent people from accessing the court system. The work being done is about more than forms or procedures. It is about helping people feel empowered to move forward, ask questions, understand their options, and take the next steps on their own. Supporting self-represented individuals

and improving access to justice reflects the same spirit of independence and opportunity that helped shape the foundation of our country 250 years ago.

As we recognize this historic milestone, the LRC is proud to be part of ongoing efforts to make the justice system more accessible, understandable, and welcoming for everyone in our community. —rh

FROM COMMON LAW TO COURT ORDER: 250 YEARS OF NAME CHANGES IN AMERICA AND GENESEE COUNTY

The history of name-change proceedings in Genesee County reflects the broader evolution of American law, from the flexible common-law right to assume a new name to the structured court process used today.

Before Genesee County was established in 1837, American courts followed English common-law principles. Individuals could often adopt and use a new name without a court order, provided the change was not made for fraudulent purposes. Identity was frequently established through reputation and consistent use rather than official records. Michigan formalized the

process with the Probate Code of 1939, creating a statutory procedure for court-ordered name changes. Petitioners were required to file a written request, establish



residency, provide a valid reason for the change, and demonstrate the absence of fraudulent intent.

A major procedural change occurred in 1998 when Michigan created the Family Di-

vision of the Circuit Court. Although the governing statutes remained in the Probate Code, responsibility for hearing name-change petitions shifted to the Family Division, where such cases continue to be heard today.

For many years, adults seeking a name change were generally required to undergo fingerprinting, criminal-history background checks, and publication of notice unless confidentiality was granted by the court.

Michigan's most recent reform took effect on April 2, 2025, through Public Act

229 of 2024. The legislation removed the presumption that individuals with criminal records were seeking a name change for fraudulent purposes and eliminated certain background-check requirements, simplifying the process while preserving judicial oversight.

From informal common-law practices to modern court procedures, the history of name changes in Genesee County demonstrates how the law has adapted to changing views on identity, privacy, and access to justice. —hd

BRING YOUR CHILD TO WORK DAY: A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

The Legal Records Division was pleased to participate in this year's Bring Your Child to Work Day. We extend our sincere appreciation to Court Administration for providing staff with the opportunity to share their workplace with their children and offer them a firsthand look at the important work done within the court system.

This year, the Legal Records Division welcomed two participants: Jade Beattie, daughter of Court Opera-

tions Specialist Morgan Mikola, and Mychael Davis, daughter of Heather Davis, Operations/Public Engage-



Mychael Davis and Commissioner Dr. Beverly Brown

ment Manager for the Legal Records Division. Throughout the day, they had the opportunity to observe daily court operations, learn about the many responsibilities of court staff, and gain a greater understanding of the vital services the court provides to the community.

A memorable highlight of the day was the opportunity for the girls to meet and interact with members of the judiciary and local government. Mychael had the privilege of meeting Genesee County Commissioner Dr. Beverly Brown and Circuit Court Judge Elizabeth Kelly, while Jade spent time with Circuit Court Judge Mark Latchana. These experiences provided valuable insight into public service,

leadership, and the important roles these individuals play in serving the residents of Genesee County.

Bring Your Child to Work Day is a meaningful experience that helps children develop an appreciation for the value of hard work, responsibility, and public service. It also allows them to see firsthand the dedication and professionalism their parents bring to their work each day. The Legal Records Division was honored to share this experience with our young visitors and hopes it inspired a greater understanding of the court system and sparked curiosity about future educational and career opportunities. hd

Ken Galvas worked as a painter for Genesee County Building and Grounds, now Facilities and Operations. His position title described only a fraction of his contribution to Genesee County.

Ken was an expert on the Flint Faience Tile Company, likely unknown by many who will read these words.

The Flint Faience Tile Co. was founded by Albert Champion, whose original business became known as AC Spark Plug. A ceramic collar was needed for each piece. The kilns used were being turned on and off too often and it was destructive to their longevity.

Champion brought in a ceramic expert from Zanesville, Ohio and a designer from Mexico to pursue other creative work using the kilns. Hence, the Flint Faience Tile Company was born. It lived for only a short time, 1921-1933.

Many of Flint's finest homes, owned by industrialists and early entrepreneurs, were adorned with the tile in entrances, bathrooms and often throughout the home. Many of these installations still survive. Schools and other buildings of the period had Flint Faience Tile above the main entrance.

The products were not limited to the Flint area and found its way throughout

the world. Interestingly, Steve and Roseanne Heddy live in a home in the College and Cultural area featuring a large installation of Flint Faience Tile.

Ken co-authored the definitive book on Flint Faience Tile, *Flint Faience Tiles A-Z*, published in 2004. It is still in print.

When the Genesee County Courthouse was going through its restoration period, 1998-2003, Ken was deeply interested in and valuable to the process.

The main restorationists, Steve Davidek and family, Steve Heddy and team, were kindred spirits to Ken. He gravitated toward them, to support and assist even in the smallest of ways. He knew color, he knew local history, he knew artists and the creative tempo of their daily work. He was off stage, but there. He was part of the cast, he fit.

Ken was much more than just a Flint Faience Tile expert. He was an American ceramic pottery collector, not just tiles. He was also a top notch wood worker, framing tiles and making other arts and crafts or art deco period pieces. It was excellent work.

One weekend I received a call from Ken. He was at an auction near Lansing and two 1920's jewelry store dis-

play cases were part of the sale items.

He said that they would look good on the 2nd floor of the Courthouse to display various historical artifacts. As I recall, we had spoken about such pieces. Ken said he thought there was low demand for the items and they could be acquired for a modest price.

I asked if he had money with him to make the deal or should I get in my car and drive over. He had the money and we have the 2 display cases on the 2nd floor.

As a collector of Pewabic tile, I had a connection with Ken and an appreciation for this area of artistic expression. Ken also had an affinity for Pewabic tile, often harvesting tile from an old building being torn down in the Detroit area.

He would get a call from "his guy" and down he would go to see what was available. Ken would sell tiles, but only to those who appreciated the craftsmanship. I have several pieces of the work of Ken Galvas and each is special in large part because Ken either se-

lected them, made the frame, made the table or somehow had his stamp of approval.

My husband and I were at an auction one weekend where Pewabic pieces were a feature draw. Ken told me about the

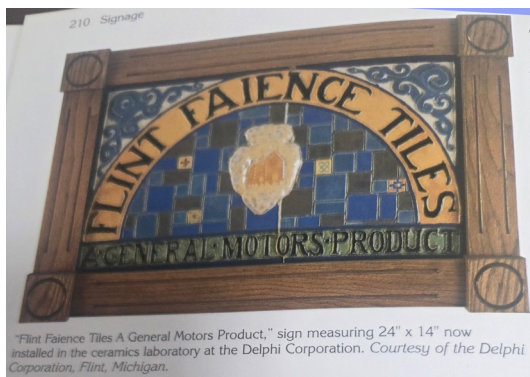
auction. There was a piece that I really wanted. I did not know that Ken would be there, but he was there.

I asked Ken what the top

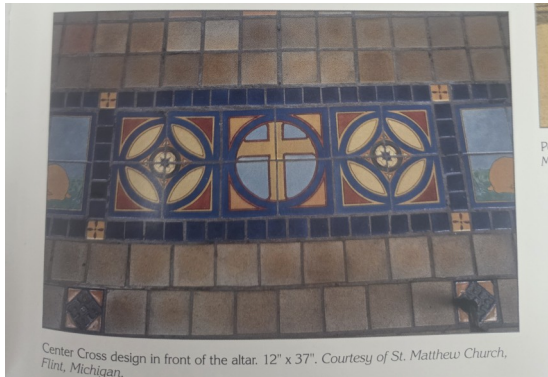
bid should be, not wanting to get caught up in the emotion of the sale. Ken gave the "pay no more" bid. Later, he told me it was worth more but he wanted to leave "some room" because he just knew I would go further. I did not, Ken.

Walk by the 3rd floor of the Courthouse, transition space, and you will see a frame on the wall dedicated to the Flint Faience Tile Co., featuring Ken Galvas.

Davidek, Heddy and Galvas. All fine people with a certain quiet demeanor of self-assurance, limited ego and respect for the work of the art historian and preservationist. – bam



"Flint Faience Tiles A General Motors Product," sign measuring 24" x 14" now installed in the ceramics laboratory at the Delphi Corporation. Courtesy of the Delphi Corporation, Flint, Michigan.



Center Cross design in front of the altar. 12" x 37". Courtesy of St. Matthew Church, Flint, Michigan.



Typical inlay accent tile installed on the exterior of Sacred Heart Church in Flint, Michigan. 6" x 6". Stock design no. 6446. \$100-125.

HISTORY OF THE PROBATE REGISTER

The Probate Courts in Michigan are not what one would consider a “typical” court system – i.e., not something you would see on *Law & Order* where the prosecution is seeking to convict an individual, who is represented by a defense attorney. There are (generally) no adversarial *A vs B* cases in probate involving a plaintiff and a defendant. Rather, the probate court system centers around an individual, whether a deceased individual, an individual who requires protection (e.g., guardian for an adult or minor), or one who may require commitment for mental illness.

Another unique aspect of the court is the role of the Probate Register (not to be confused with Registrar – a role associated with maintenance of records, typically in the academic setting). The Probate Register is appointed by the chief probate judge, pursuant to statute (MCL 600.833), whose duties and powers are prescribed in the Revised Judicature Act and Estates and Protected Individuals Code.

The probate register-judge relationship is an important fixture for the probate court given the intuitional knowledge and operation of the administrative side of the court. What is the history of this relationship in

Michigan, and how did this dynamic evolve?

When the territory of Michigan came into existence in 1805, there was a provision



in the law “concerning wills and intestacies” adopted August 31, 1805, that the then- territorial district courts, the “clerk of the court” of the district, or any judge in the territory would have powers associated with probate jurisdiction.

It is presumed there was a probate judge in each district of the territory with the power to appoint the “clerk” or register of the court. The district courts were legislated out of existence in 1810 and for a brief time the Supreme Court was given jurisdiction to probate a will.

In January of 1811 a law was established which provided for a “Register” in each district of the territory to probate and administer

wills along with other traditional duties performed by probate courts. The probate register also had the responsibility of recording conveyances to land.

The 1811-1818 time period signified the first vestige in Michigan of the official role of the probate register as a court officer and record-keeper with broad power and jurisdiction.

The “Register” had expansive powers – the official was authorized to issue letters testamentary and of administration; to issue letters to collect and preserve estates; to try will contests with juries; to compel production of wills; to remove executors and administrators for refusing or neglecting to account; to appoint, remove, and control guardians; to commission persons to make partition of land; to partition land; to authorize the sale of estate lands; to examine upon interrogatories persons suspected of embezzlement; to make equitable distribution of insolvent estates; to issue commissions for the taking of testimony; to compel representatives to account; among others.

The 1811 law provided for appeal of a Register’s decision to the Supreme Court, if the matter in controversy was of a value of \$100. In July of 1818, the Michigan Probate Code was passed, which formed the

basis for the current probate court system in place today – i.e., establishing a Judge/ Register court system to handle deceased estates, guardianships, filing and recording of wills, etc.

The dynamic between Register and Judge is certainly unique, one that is foundational in the history of the Michigan territory.

The present power and authority of the Probate Register relates to administrative items and uncontested matters, such as informal deceased estates, issuing letters of authority, and addressing uncontested proceedings.

The Probate Judge is tasked with decision-making on contested matters, formal deceased estates, and resolving other proceedings where a judicial determination must be made among differing parties – a role naturally suited for a judge.

For additional history of the probate court, see feature article from [April 2022 Hearsay, Volume 8, Issue 3](#).

Historical information credit to: William Wirt Blum, *Probate and Administration on the American Frontier: A Study of the Probate Records of Wayne County – Northwest Territory 1796-1803; Indiana Territory 1803-1805; Michigan Territory 1805-1816*, Michigan Law Review – University of Michigan Law School, Volume 58, Issue 2 (1959). –so



GENESEE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION AND CENTENNIAL INN OF COURT AWARD CEREMONY, JUNE 4, 2026

Barbara A. Menear was awarded the Herbert A. Miliken, Jr. Civility Award, presented to an attorney who exemplifies the highest professional standards of courtesy and civility. Barbara has been in private practice and is now the Circuit Court Administrator. At one time, she was the Genesee County Public Defender and the Circuit Court Administrator. Barbara is actively involved with both the Genesee County Bar Foundation, serving as its vice-president and is the vice-chair of the State Bar Standing Committee on Character and Fitness.

Andrea Legendre was awarded the Brian M. Barkey Award for Community Service and was recognized for her community service with

a number of local non-profit and agency boards. She brought with her to the awards night representatives from three of those agencies to celebrate in the events. Andrea currently works for the Genesee County Prosecutor as the Bureau Chief of the Circuit Court Division.

Jared Field, Genesee County Public Communications Director, was awarded the *Roberta Wray Award* for excellence in the area of journalism or law. Roberta was a journalist on a local TV station for many years, in private practice and then served as a magistrate for the 67th District Court. Jared was recognized for his contribution to Black History month by including local legal notables in his communications and assisting with

the 2026 GCBA Law Day Activities, as well as drawing on his technical skills when the e-invitation for the grand opening events of the Legal Resource Center was designed.

The Golden Apple Award was presented to *Dr. Kimberly Saks* for her impactful partnership with the Legal Resource Center. Through her role at University of Michigan-Flint, she has helped secure funding and coordinate student interns who support LRC operations and contribute to research aimed at improving access to justice. This collaboration provides students with meaningful, hands-on experience while strengthening services for the Genesee County community, promotes civic engagement, and

supports initiatives aligned with Law Day.

The Liberty Bell Award was presented to the Genesee County Jury Board Members consisting of *Karen Aldridge-Eason*, *Henry Hatter* and *Paul Rozycki*.

These members are nominated by the Circuit Judges to a 6 year term and confirmed by the Genesee County Board of Commissioners. All are talented and respected citizens in their respective careers who help the community understand and appreciate the value of serving as a juror.

The Liberty Bell Award is presented to recognize outstanding community service and demonstrated efforts to strengthen the American legal system and civil understanding. –bam

COURTHOUSE VISITS FROM GENESEE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS

It has been busy at the Courthouse with Law Day activities and other visiting students.

On April 30, 2026, Judge B. Chris Christenson hosted students from Southwestern High School in his courtroom. Judge Christenson enlists a number of court and county staff to speak about their positions, including what level of education is required. The students were treated to a lunch supplied by a grant from the Genesee County Bar Foundation.

On May 1, 2026, Judge David J. Newblatt hosted students from Goodrich High School. The students listened to scheduled court events, followed by a conversation with Judge Newblatt about what takes place in a Courthouse. There was an opportunity for questions.

Both events are encores from previous years. –bam



WHY DO ADULTS GET ADOPTED?

We cannot *choose* the family we are born into, but adult adoptees can *choose* their legal parents.

When most people hear adoption, adult adoptions are often an afterthought. Most people immediately think of foster care, stepparent, and relative adoptions before considering adults who also seek adoption for sentimental and practical reasons.

Adult adoptions may be overlooked, but are common. The 7th Judicial Circuit Court has completed over 20 Genesee County adult adoptions since 2025.

An adult adoption is a legal process in which petitioners (adoptive parents) request permission to adopt a person over the age of 18.

To initiate the adult adoption process in Genesee County, a petition must be filed at the Court. Petitioners must reside in the county and are required to submit basic information about themselves and the adoptee. Both the petitioners and the adoptee must provide a written statement detailing the reasons they are pursuing the adoption.

The adoption process involves a \$186 fee for the adoption petition and the order of adoption. The cost for a new birth certificate is based on the state the adoptee was born in (Michigan is \$50). The new birth certificate will list the petitioners as the parents

and will arrive in the mail six to eight weeks after the adoption is finalized.

Biological parents who are not joining the petition are not required to consent to an adult adoption, unlike in foster care, stepparent, and relative adoptions, where their rights must be terminated to free the minor for

the celebratory portion of the adoption process. The Honorable Ariana E. Heath oversees Genesee County adult adoptions. During the confirmation hearings, she offers the family words of encouragement and reminds them that it is a beautiful thing when people *choose* to become family.



adoption. The adoptee is the only party required to consent in an adult adoption.

After the petitioners submit the required paperwork, an adoption worker begins the investigation. A worker will contact the petitioners and the adoptee and will ask a series of autobiographical and practical questions. The adoption worker will file a written report of investigation, which includes a recommendation to a Judge.

Then, a hearing is scheduled for the adoptee to consent to their adoption, which is usually followed by a confirmation hearing. The biological parent(s) who are not joining the petition are required to be notified of the hearing, but cannot impede the adoption in any way. The confirmation hearing is

The reasons adults seek adoption vary, but it is important to recognize that every reason has validity.

"Most of the adult adoptions we get are stepparents legally adopting their adult children," said Darious Baylock, an adoption worker in the Family Division for nearly a decade. "For some, this is their Christmas gift or Father's Day gift to their stepfather. These adult adoptees want that connection with them because they have had a hand in raising them their whole life."

Baylock once had a case involving 70-year-old stepchildren and their 90-year-old stepfather, who was on his deathbed. The stepfather wanted to make his adult children his heirs as he was the only father they knew.

The stepchildren were satisfied emotionally when he was finally recognized as their legal father after the adoption was finalized.

The 90-year-old stepfather passed away a month after finalization. Since adult adoptees have the same inheritance rights as biological children in Michigan, this stepfather ensured that his belongings were also passed down to those he *chose* as family.

His children may have faced disputes over the estate with their stepsiblings had the adoption not been finalized. It was a feel-good story that the 90-year-old stepfather was finally recognized as his children's legal father, but this adoption also occurred for inheritance purposes.

Some adults seek their parents' benefits when pursuing adoption. Non-legal parents often face challenges when trying to add their adult child to their insurance plan. Completing an adult adoption can help ensure that the adoptee is eligible for the same benefits as a biological child.

Adult adoptions can establish emotional permanency like foster care, stepparent, and relative adoptions. Adult adoptions legalize longstanding child-parent relationships, strengthen emotional bonds, make estate planning straightforward, and can correct the past. Having legal recognition of the person you *chose* as your parent offers one a feeling of safety and stability. —bs



FOC—A CENTURY OF CHANGE

Michigan established the Friend of the Court (“FOC”) in 1919, with an office created in every county to help ensure children received proper support and care. While the original mission focused on protecting the support and well-being of children, the position actually began in Wayne County when the judges were concerned about divorced women being left destitute and without means to enforce their own support. In 1918, Judge Ira W. Jayne appointed Edward Pokorny as a special prosecutor known as the “Friend of the Court” to assist with divorce matters and relieve support recipients of the burden of pursuing enforcement themselves.

The original FOC Act assigned a variety of duties, some far beyond what we would consider domestic relations work today. Friends investigated financial matters, attempted to reconcile couples, and made recommendations to improve family circumstances. Over time, the focus shifted toward support enforcement, custody and parenting time recommendations, and establishing support for children, including those born outside of wedlock.

In 1932, Friends from around the state formed the Michigan Friend of the Court Association (“FOCA”) to share ideas and improve services. As family structures and economic conditions evolved, so did the work of local FOC offices.

However, Genesee County did not have an identified “Friend of the Court” position for many years after the Friend of the Court Act was implemented, and the Circuit Court Judges essentially handled these duties on their own. In 1964, Governor George Romney appointed one of the local FOC employ-

In the 1980s, Michigan passed legislation strengthening FOC enforcement powers, requiring every Friend of the Court to be appointed by the Chief Judge of the Circuit, and establishing statewide oversight and administration of the child support program.

In 2001, while Genesee County FOC was under the leadership of Judge Jennie Barkey, FOCA and the individual Friends found themselves under attack from the other branches of state government. State Representatives

launched a committee to investigate the FOCs. Members of the executive branch opened an investigation into the number of outstanding warrants for unpaid support. The Governor at the time even attempted to privatize FOC and change the name to Court Family Services. After a lot of back and forth, the push for privatization ultimately failed, but certain functions were centralized and became the responsibility of the Office of Child Support and SCAO.

In 2016, the Federal Government passed legislation to wrestle control of the child support program back from the states, taking over regulation of the child support formula, contempt proceedings, health insurance, and review of support for incarcerated individuals. The Friends resisted and attempted to block any related policies but ultimately leveraged the disagreement to get improvements in ac-

cess to information and functional improvements to the MiCSSES system.

Throughout all these many changes, Friends of the Court adapted while maintaining their core mission. As our local community has changed, so has the work of FOC here in Genesee County. Previously, single-income, married families, mostly employed by GM, were the norm and the local economy was strong. Now, we see more unmarried case filings than divorces, both parents are generally working to support the family, and while GM is still the largest employer in the county, it has about 10% of the local jobs it once offered.

FOC continues to focus on adapting to the community we serve and harmonizing the demands of both the state and federal offices we work with, much like the Friends of old. However, it looks a lot different than it used to; most of the clients we serve never step foot into our office. We are available to answer questions and even prepare stipulated orders by email, text, Zoom, online chat, phone, in-person, in the community, and on a variety of social media platforms.

Despite a century of change, our purpose remains the same. We work with families to create workable orders, encourage long-term compliance, and ensure children receive the support they need. Like Edward Pokorny and Robert Standal before us, we remain focused on improving outcomes for children and reducing poverty by helping families secure the support they deserve. The times may change, but our mission does not. —jk



ees, Robert Standal, to lead the department, formally creating the county’s Director position. Robert served for 25 years, followed by Judge Jennie Barkey (1989–2006), Jack Battles (2006–2021), Judge Anthony McDowell (2021–2024), and now myself. (Talk about standing on the shoulders of giants!)

Things continued smoothly for Robert and the other Friends until 1975, when Title IV-D of the Social Security Act established a federal child support enforcement program. While federal funding expanded resources, it also brought significant new requirements. More attention was focused on public assistance cases, and the Prosecuting Attorney was made responsible for establishing paternity and support. The Feds continued to implement changes and provide new tools for local offices to enforce support.

geneseeLIVING

July events from
www.exploreflintandgenesee.org

Jul01



Born in the USA: American Studio Glass

Recurring every week day until October 16, 2026

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School (FIA)

Jul01



Change Starts Here - Sloan Museum Celebrates America 250

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until December 30, 2026

Sloan Museum of Discovery

Jul01

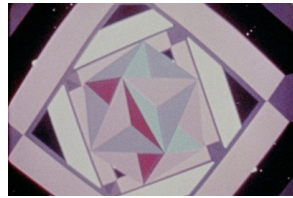


Dungeons & Dragons Nights: Chronicles from the Collection

Recurring weekly on Wednesday until August 5, 2026

Sloan Museum of Discovery

Jul01



Euclidean Illusions

Recurring daily until August 31, 2026

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School

Jul01



Flushing Area Concerts In The Park

Recurring weekly on Wednesday until August 5, 2026

Flushing's Downtown Entertainment District

Jul01



FrankE & DawnE Karaoke

Recurring weekly on Wednesday

S & K Hometown Pub

Jul01



M.C. Escher: Infinite Variations

Recurring daily until September 13, 2026

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School

Jul01



One World One Sky: Big Bird's Adventure

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until July 3, 2026

Longway Planetarium

Jul01



Skies Over Michigan

Recurring weekly on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday until August 2, 2026

Longway Planetarium

Jul01



Spirit of Independence

Recurring daily until October 18, 2026

Flint Institute of Arts Museum + Art School (FIA)

Jul01



The Lost World of Dragons | Traveling Exhibit

Recurring weekly on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Sat-

urday until September 12, 2026

Sloan Museum of Discovery



WIP Wednesdays Workshop

Recurring weekly on Wednesday
 Breads & Threads Hand-made



Fenton Concerts in the Park

Recurring weekly on Thursday until September 17, 2026
 Rackham Park behind Fenton Community & Cultural Center



Fenton Farmers Market

Recurring weekly on Thursday until September 17, 2026
 Front lawn of Fenton Community & Cultural Center



2026 Fenton Freedom Festival

Downtown Fenton

Jul03

(Continued on page 14)

geneseeLIVING (CONT'D)



Clio Fireworks & Family Fun Day

Bethany United Methodist Church - launch point and surrounding Clio area
Jul03



Davison Township Museum
Recurring weekly on Friday

Davison Township Museum
Jul03



First Fridays at Longway Planetarium - Dinosaur C.S.I.

Recurring monthly on the 1st Friday
Longway Planetarium
Jul03



Modern Calligraphy for Beginners at Sip N Swirl

Sip N Swirl
Jul03



Shark Kingdom

Recurring weekly on Friday, Saturday until July 3, 2026

Longway Planetarium

Jul03



Taylor Swift Laser Light Show

Recurring weekly on Friday, Saturday until July 3, 2026

Longway Planetarium
Jul04



Davison Farmers Market Craft Show & Flea Market

Davison Farmers Market
Jul04



Fenton Firecracker 5K & 2K Run/Walk

Fenton Ellen Street Campus
Jul04



FIM 4th of July Celebration

Downtown Flint Flat Lot
Jul04



Whaley Historic House Museum Open Tours

Recurring monthly on the 1st Saturday

Whaley Historic House Museum

Jul05



Grand Blanc Heritage Museum

Recurring weekly on Sunday

Grand Blanc Heritage Association Museum

Jul06



Mundy Summer Camp

Recurring daily until July 10, 2026

Mundy Sportsplex

Jul06



Raising Monarchs Lake Callis Recreation Complex

Jul07



Foraging for Native Plants

Robert Williams Nature and Historical Learning Center

Jul07



Karaoke at the Mill Pond and Food Truck Fun

Kimble Sharp Park and Gazebo

Jul07



Swartz Creek Fine Arts 42nd annual summer concert series

Recurring weekly on Tuesday until August 4, 2026
Fred & Phyllis Pajtas Theater

Jul07



UM-Flint Summer Vocal Academy of Music 2026

Recurring every week day until July 17, 2026

University of Michigan-Flint Theatre and Dance

Jul08



Mighty Mile - Free Race for Kids

Carman Ainsworth Middle School Track
Jul09



Scoop de Loop 5K Run/Walk & Junior Scoop Shuffle

Jul09

1776 – IT'S COMPLICATED (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 1)

yer before being examined by the bar was the standard of the day. He studied for 5 years with Wythe and was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767, already thought of as one of the most esteemed lawyers in America.

He served as the Secretary of State, under President George Washington and as the second Vice-President under President John Adams before becoming the 3rd President of the United States. He successfully brokered the Louisiana Purchase,

doubling the size of the United States and founded the University of Virginia.

What Michigan cities and sites pre-dated the Declaration of Independence?

The City of Sault Sainte Marie founded by the French in 1668, is the oldest city in Michigan and the third oldest city in the United States.

St. Ignace was founded by Father Marquette in 1671 and named after St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Father Marquette established a mission for Native Americans in Marquette in 1675.

In 1701, French Officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit, the future city of Detroit on the west bank of the Detroit River.

Fort Michilimackinac was an 18th century French and later British fort and trading post at the Straits of Mackinac. It was built in 1715 on the tip of the lower peninsula and later moved by the British to Mack-

inac Island in 1780 where the Americans took control in 1796.

It would be 61 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence that Michigan would become the 26th state on January 26, 1837. –bam



CHIEF SPEAKS (CONT'D)

(Continued from page 2)

more murders and less justice, which creates a self-reinforcing loop leading to more violence.

Having said all of that, I want to stress that the Gunundrum is a dynamic, not a destiny. The situation can be changed through policy reforms, greater resources, education, opportunity, and culture. What is the role of the criminal justice system? Simply this: we must do our jobs cognizant of the Gunundrum without giving in to it. That means ensuring that the system works well enough so that legitimate self-defense

is recognized, witnesses are protected and everyone's rights are preserved.

This is how we make Homer Simpson wrong—at least as to guns. –cjdjn

DID YOU KNOW

Denmark, Norway, Ireland and the Philippines, all have substantial celebrations on the 4th of July to commemorate the number of immigrants from their countries who reside in the United States or to honor longstanding treaties and political ties between nations.



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