



Hamilton County Genealogical Society

Judge James Cissell Award – April 16, 2011

We are honored to have Judge James Cissell with us this morning. He was raised and educated in Hamilton County and therefore is interested in its history. He received his law degree from the University of Cincinnati. He has served in many professional and public office capacities, as well as council member and vice Mayor of Cincinnati in 1976 and 1977. As our primary interest is in local records, for us, his most important elective appointments are as Clerk of Courts from 1992 to 2003 and as Judge of the Probate court since 2003.

As Clerk of Courts, he set a vision of making all their documents available online, the first in the state of Ohio. By 1999, the first goal was reached with 1.5 million documents available on their website. By 2001, it was up to nearly 4 million documents. This was such an accomplishment, in 1999, out of hundreds of nominees from 22 countries, the Clerk's website was awarded the ComputerWorld Smithsonian Medallion Award for "innovative application of technology that produce positive social, economic and educational change."

In 2003, now as Judge Cissell, he carried his vision to the Probate Court office. His next vision was to preserve 1,600 books and over 1 million pages, by converting the paper and microfilm to digital images. At that time, only documents created after 1983 were available online. In December 2009, after a six year conversion effort, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported: "more than 1 million documents – some dating to 1791 – are now available online from the Probate Court that will be a boon to genealogy buffs, and history researchers". Judge Cissell said then: "There are many, many folks who wish to trace their genealogy. By doing this, people will not have to come to our office in Cincinnati,"

As incredible as these efforts were, he is not done. With millions of documents to go, what should be done first? In January, the Judge invited me to work with his staff to help prioritize their efforts. In March, he approved my proposal for a joint effort between our Chapter and his staff to digitize thousands of inventory and account records that survived the 1884 court house fire. Chapter volunteers will transcribe indexes for these records to put on their website. If our probate record access is not already the best in the nation, it soon will be.

So, for his foresight, the monumental effort, and for the revolutionary access to Hamilton County historical and genealogical records, and with even more to come, it is my honor and great pleasure to award Judge James Cissell, our Chapter's Certificate of Appreciation.

Jim Dempsey, Hamilton County Genealogical Society, Research & Preservation

Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society