



SHARON R. BOCK
Clerk & Comptroller
Palm Beach County

A History of the Clerk & Comptroller Palm Beach County

- Established 1909 -

Since its origin in 1909, the office of the Clerk & Comptroller, Palm Beach County has evolved into a world-class organization of 800 employees. Recipient of the Governor's Sterling Award for Organizational Performance Excellence, the Clerk & Comptroller's office merges solid business strategies with government to deliver outstanding service with the highest level of integrity.

The Florida Constitution establishes the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court. Directly elected by the public to operate independently of the County Commission, the Clerk of the Court serves three major functions: as the financial watchdog for county expenditures, as the repository of and custodian for all legal records and as the service and support center for the county's court system. The Clerk & Comptroller's Office performs more than 1,000 different functions in carrying out these duties.

HISTORY

The court system of the American Colonies was patterned after that of England. When the colonies declared their independence and became a union of states, these states developed a system of jurisprudence based upon that original pattern. When the courts were being developed in England, the clergymen were among the few who were literate. Consequently, the judges and subordinate officers of the courts

were selected from that group. Thus, the title of the Office of Clerk comes to us from the Latin, Clericus, meaning clergyman.

"To protect, preserve and maintain the public records and public funds with integrity and accountability."

*Mission Statement
Clerk & Comptroller, Palm Beach County*

The Constitution of the State of Florida authorizes and provides for a Clerk of the Circuit Court in each county. The Constitution prescribes that the clerk shall also be Clerk of the County Court, and of the Board of County Commissioners, as well as County Recorder. The Constitution also makes the Clerk Ex Officio Auditor of the county. It provides that the Clerk's duties and compensation shall be as prescribed by law.

The Clerks of the Circuit Court are elected for a term of four years at a general election held for the purpose of electing all county officers. The first election in the state of Florida to such office, under the Constitution of 1885, was held in 1888, and elections have been held every four years since then.

On July 1, 1909, the state Legislature established Palm Beach County as the 47th county in Florida,

with West Palm Beach named as the county seat. Before then, the county had been a part of Dade County. The county's population was approximately 5,500 in 1909, compared to 1.3 million today. The largest of Florida's 67 counties, Palm Beach County has 2,023 square miles of land and 245 square miles of surface water, making it the largest county east of the Mississippi River.

Fred E. Fenno was the first elected Palm Beach County Circuit Court Clerk. He took his post in 1909 for the first Palm Beach County commission meeting on July 6 of that year. Commissioners approved his salary of \$75 per month. Fenno was known for his excellent penmanship, which certainly aided in the recording of commission minutes, done in longhand at that time.

Commissioners determined that the temporary and first courthouse for Palm Beach County would be housed



Constructed in 1916, the first new courthouse was located on Dixie Highway in West Palm Beach.

in an old school building located at the corner of Clematis and Poinsettia streets (now known as Dixie Highway). Court proceedings remained in that location

until the construction of a new building a few blocks north in 1916. Wings were added to the building in 1927, followed by additions in 1955. In 1972, the original building was completely encased in a wrap-around expansion. A new judicial complex opened across from the original building on Dixie Highway in 1995.

James Alexander Arnette and John B. Dunkle served the longest terms as Clerk of Courts, with 22 and 28 years respectively. When he was voted into office in 1958, John B. Dunkle, at the age of 30, was the youngest elected official in Palm Beach County. Retiring in 1991 at age 63, Clerk Dunkle noted his discontent with advancing technology and how computers and telephone machines had impersonalized the office. In his years of service, he had perhaps witnessed the most technological advances and had seen



The new Judicial Center opened in 1995 and stands across from the original 1916 building on Dixie Highway in West Palm Beach.

his office expand from a staff of seven employees to more than 670. His salary grew, too, from \$10,000 in 1959 to \$87,500 in 1991.

Rapid and progressive change characterized Dorothy H. Wilken's twelve-year term as Clerk. The county's first female Clerk, Wilken took office in 1993 with the primary objective of operating the office using a strong business model. Clerk Wilken implemented Total Quality Management to incorporate teamwork and sound problem-solving methods into the office and created a Management Operating System to measure department productivity and performance.

In 1999, the office adopted the

Clerks of Court from 1909 to the Present

Fred E. Fenno, Date of Commission: July 1909
Hutson B. Saunders, Date of Commission: December 1910
George O. Butler, Date of Commission: January 1917
Fred E. Fenno, Date of Commission: January 1925
George O. Butler, Date of Commission: January 1937
James Alexander Arnette, Date of Commission: January 1941
John B. Dunkle, Date of Commission: January 1965
Milton T. Bauer, Date of Commission: January 1992
Dorothy H. Wilken, Date of Commission: January 1993
Sharon R. Bock, Date of Commission: January 2005

Source: Florida State Archives

Florida Sterling framework as its organizational model. A series of best business practices in areas such as leadership, customer service, process improvement, employee satisfaction and strategic planning led to the office earning the prestigious Governor's Sterling Award for organizational performance excellence in 2003. Based on the well-known national Baldrige Award, the Sterling is the highest honor for business excellence in the State of Florida.

The office's tradition of excellence continued following Clerk Wilken's retirement. Her Chief Deputy of six years, Sharon R. Bock, was elected to office in 2004. Clerk Bock is the first attorney to hold the office of Clerk in Palm Beach County. As a former corporate general manager, title company owner and finance and investment advisor, she possesses the unique combination of skills necessary to oversee all of the office's diverse responsibilities.

One of Clerk Bock's first improvements was to change the title of the office from Clerk of Courts to Clerk & Comptroller to more aptly convey the financial responsibilities of her office. Additionally, she created a new seal to illustrate the three primary functions of the office.

A long-time champion of public records modernization, Clerk Bock has spearheaded several technology projects,

bringing service and information to the public in the office and on the Internet at www.pbcountyclerk.com. Through community outreach, she has effectively balanced emerging privacy concerns with the public's right to access public records. This has been a key area of focus in the early part of her first term in office, along with an increased emphasis on the office's constitutional duties as county accountant, treasurer and auditor.

Operating on a set of seven values, employees of the Clerk & Comptroller's office strive to be the world-class leader in customer service, employee satisfaction, and standards of excellence.



Sharon R. Bock, Esq.
*Clerk & Comptroller, Palm Beach County
Elected November 2004*

Clerk & Comptroller, Palm Beach County
301 N. Olive Avenue, 9th floor
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401
561.355.2996
www.mypalmbeachclerk.com