

# 2001 Annual Report

of

**Robert E. McCarthy, Register of Probate**

**Plymouth County Probate and Family Court**

As the year 2001 winds down, it is time to review the year at the Plymouth Probate and Family Court from my perspective as Plymouth County Register of Probate. I was elected as Plymouth County Register of Probate in November 2000 and assumed office in late December 2000. Thus, this report constitutes my first annual report.

The major objective of the Registry is to provide customer satisfaction through friendly and professional service and accurate records. Based on my observations and comments from Court users, the Registry staff accomplished that objective in 2001 with their courteous, competent and professional performance.

A main area of emphasis and achievement in 2001 was the technological advances, both in training of and use by staff and in public access. Employees of the Court received training in the Trial Court's uniform interim BAScot computer system and adapted extremely well to the new system. The Court implemented the system on July 2, 2001. Under BAScot our staff can index and docket all new cases as well as convert old cases to the BAScot system for docketing when applicable. All employees have handled this transition in an exceptional manner. All departments are current in docketing and issuing citations, summons and other vital documents. Processing time has decreased. We have started down the path to eliminating those bulky, old docket books.

As part of the transition to BAScot, our staff did an extensive update of old index records to facilitate use of the expanded index system. Index cards are no longer needed, except for very limited matters. Employees of the Domestic Relations and Probate Departments did an outstanding job in updating the old index cards as well as adapting to BAScot. Domestic Relations records are available on the computer index from 1922 to the present. Probate, Estate and Name Change records are available on the computer index from 1980 to the present. Older records are located in consolidated index books. The computer index terminals are located at our Plymouth and Brockton offices and at the Registry of Deeds office in Plymouth. Users of the terminals have expressed satisfaction at the functioning of the system.

Special thanks are in order to the users of the Court for their patience through this process so that the Court could maximize the potential of the transition, and make as much information as possible available on the computer index system.

I am pleased to report that we initiated a website for the Court around July 2, 2001. The URL is <http://www.pcpfc.com>. Diane Bender, the technology support supervisor of our Court, created and developed this very useful website. After its initial start up, comments were received from lawyers and members of the general public who used the site. Suggestions have been incorporated in the updates on the site. Information on the site includes: many Court forms in an interactive format (which means the form can be filled out on line and then printed out for signature and forwarded to the Court); Court trial lists and motion schedules; information for pro se litigants; staff information and telephone numbers; fee schedules; and legal assistance information.

Since its inception, over 25,000 hits have been made on the website. In the first three weeks of December, there was an average of about 2500 hits per week. I have been pleasantly surprised at the popularity of the website. The site has been designed to be user friendly. I believe it accomplishes that purpose. With Webmaster Diane Bender's invaluable assistance, we will continue to monitor and update the website to provide relevant and helpful information.

The Paternity Department and Abuse Prevention Department of our Court moved from Plymouth to Brockton in late June. This aided us in reducing overcrowding at the Plymouth location and in better utilizing our space in the Brockton Trial Court. The move has worked well and the departmental employees are doing a great job.

The Trial Department continued to perform well with the many challenges of our single calendar system and adapted well to the many changes taking place in the Court.

The Register's office at the new Brockton courthouse has seen a marked increase in utilization by the public, litigants and attorneys. The Register's office staff has done an excellent job in handling the increased demands. The Brockton courthouse is a superb facility for use by the Court, public, litigants and attorneys.

The five courtrooms in Brockton and one courtroom in Plymouth assist the Judges of the Court to handle their active caseloads, ably assisted by the assistant registers, probation officers, judicial secretaries, court officers and remaining support staff, in a manner befitting those who appear before them.

First Assistant Register Ben Harley has continued to be an invaluable resource for the Court with his legal analysis of issues, review of accounts, and dispensing of information to many inquirers.

Reclassification of all employees of the Trial Court was underway at the start of this year. The process was designed to provide a more uniform personnel system within all departments of the Trial Court. The overall process, including appeals, was completed

during the year. Laurie Devitt now serves as Office Manager and Juanita Gomes serves as Manager of the Fiscal Department.

The Plymouth County Commissioners, John P. Riordan, Jr., Chairman, Peter G. Asiaf, Jr. and Robert J. Stone authorized County Buildings Superintendent Timothy McGillicuddy to undertake repairs of the Plymouth courthouse building, including the courtroom. Sheriff Joseph F. McDonough provided work crews to complete the project. Our staff prepared many cartons for storage of old files in Trial Court storage facilities and removed all cartons from the courtroom. Our Plymouth courtroom now looks great and functions as an appropriate courtroom setting for litigants and attorneys. *Come on Down!*

The Lawyer of the Day program continues to be a valuable resource of our Court. Lucie Wilson of Pilgrim Advocates, Inc, administers the program. The Court greatly appreciates the efforts of all attorneys who volunteer their time and expertise to benefit so many deserving individuals.

The future status of our courtroom and office at Plymouth is a concern. Our Court will not be involved in the new Plymouth courthouse planned for Obery Street, which will include the Superior, District, Housing and Juvenile Courts. The Registry of Deeds will vacate our building when the new Registry of Deeds building is completed, probably in early 2004. The Department of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) of the Commonwealth is conducting a feasibility study of our Court's possible expansion into the space being vacated by the Registry of Deeds after rehabilitation of this building. If feasible, the matter would need to be coordinated between the Commonwealth and Plymouth County. I shall monitor this effort closely with the goal that a suitable Plymouth facility be provided. Tightening budget constraints will complicate this matter.

I am pleased to report that our Court, in conjunction with the District Courts of Plymouth County, has been awarded a grant by the Trial Court Judicial Institute to conduct a training program for employees with respect to issues of domestic violence. Claire MacNeill of SAFEPLAN is coordinating an effort involving members of V.E.T.O. (Violence-free Education, Training and Outreach) to plan this training session.

The entire staff of the Plymouth County Probate and Family Court has faced up to varied and interesting challenges this past year in a successful and well-motivated manner. I commend all members of the staff for their dedication in serving the users of the Court in an exemplary manner.

I look forward to working with the members of the staff of the Plymouth Probate and Family Court in addressing the needs of the Court in 2002 and in serving the users of the Court.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert E. McCarthy  
Register of Probate