

CLOCK TOWER

QUARTERLY



Winter 2025

Dell DeHay Law Library of Tarrant County

Hours:

Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:00pm

Note: Computers automatically shut down at 4:00pm

Phone Number:

817-884-1481

Email:

lawlibrary@tarrantcountytx.gov

Physical Address:

100 W. Weatherford St., Suite 420

Fort Worth, TX 76196

Website:

<https://www.tarrantcountytx.gov/en/law-library.html>

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Announcements

Fast Checkout: Tap to Pay is Here!

We're making checkout faster and easier with our new *Tap to Pay* technology. You can now simply tap your contactless card, smartphone, or smartwatch to complete your purchase—no need to insert or swipe. Whether you're paying with Apple Pay, Google Pay, or your contactless card, our new readers are ready when you are.



Internet Archive Celebrates 1 Trillion Web Pages!

In a historic achievement for digital preservation, the Internet Archive announced that it has surpassed 1 trillion web pages preserved through its Wayback Machine, the world's largest and most comprehensive archive of the internet.

Since its founding in 1996, the nonprofit organization has worked to build a shared digital library that preserves online history—capturing everything from breaking news and government documents to personal blogs and early social media posts. With the support of libraries, cultural institutions, to personal blogs and social media posts. With the support of libraries, cultural institutions, and volunteers around the globe, the Internet Archive has been a vital resource for journalists, researchers and the public. Visit the website at <https://archive.org/>.

National Library Week




Celebrate National Library Week with us! We will have coffee, sweet treats and giveaways! Mark your calendars for **April 20th to the 24th, 8:00am-4:00pm**. National Library Week is a time to recognize the vital role libraries play in strengthening communities, supporting lifelong learning and promoting access to information for all. Stop by to explore our collections and learn more about how your library supports justice and access for everyone. We're here to serve you!

January 2026

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- **Jan. 1st: New Year's Day**
County Offices Closed
- **Jan. 8th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **Jan. 19th: Martin Luther King Jr. Day**
County Offices Closed
- **Jan. 22: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)

February 2026

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- **February 5th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **February 16th: Presidents' Day**
County Offices Closed
- **February 19th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)

March 2026

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- **Mar. 5th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **Mar. 19th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **Mar. 30th: Cesar Chavez Day**
County Offices Closed

April 2026

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- **Apr 2: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **Apr. 3rd: Good Friday**
County Offices Closed
- **Apr. 16th: DRO Family Law Workshop**
Historic 1895 Courthouse
3rd Floor (Room 326)
- **April 19th-25th: National Library Week**

Spotlight: Celebrating Contributions to Law and Justice

By Brittany Schick

Each February, we celebrate African American History Month by reflecting on the profound contributions of Black Americans to our nation's story. In Tarrant County, this reflection takes on a special significance as we honor the pioneering African American judges who have shaped our local legal landscape with courage, intellect, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Judge Mary Ellen Hicks stands out as a trailblazer: she is the first African American and first woman to serve on the Second Court of Appeals (1993–1994), the first African American Probate Court Master in Tarrant County and the only African American female District Judge in Fort Worth, serving on the 231st Judicial District Court from 1982 to 1993. Judge Hicks served as a visiting judge in Tarrant County for over 19 years after leaving the court of appeals. She was named by the Houston Area Bar Poll in 1999, 2001, and 2003 as the number one Judge including District, Texas Supreme Court and Federal Judges. [1] [2]

Judge Hicks currently serves as a mediator and arbitrator in Fort Worth and Houston. She is the President of the Black Women Lawyers of Tarrant County (BWLTC). She received the 2025 Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award at the 16th Annual Tarrant County Harambee Festival. [3]

Judge L. Clifford Davis (October 12, 1924-February 15, 2025) was the first African American judge elected in Tarrant County (1983-1988). Judge Davis was also a civil rights attorney who worked with Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP on *Brown v. Board of Education*. He founded the Fort Worth Black Bar Association, which later became the L. Clifford Davis Legal Association. [4]

Judge Lisa R. Woodard is the first African American female Justice of the Peace in Tarrant County (Precinct 8, 2010-Present). She currently serves on the education committee for the Texas Justice Court Training Center and on the Tarrant County Bail Bond Board. Judge Woodard is known for her commitment to justice, compassion, and community service. [5] [6]

These achievements reflect a broader legacy of African American legal professionals and civil rights activists in North Texas who fought for desegregation, equal access to justice, and community empowerment. Their service underscores how the law has been a powerful tool for progress, ensuring that the voices of historically marginalized communities are represented in the courts and in civic life.

References

1. Southside Community Center. (n.d.). *Honorable Mary Ellen Hicks*. Southside Community Center. Retrieved from <https://www.southsidefw.org/team/honorable-maryellen-hicks>
2. Texas Judicial Branch. (n.d.). *Mary Ellen Hicks*. Retrieved from <https://www.txcourts.gov/2ndcoa/about-the-court/court-history/place-6/mary-ellen-hicks/>
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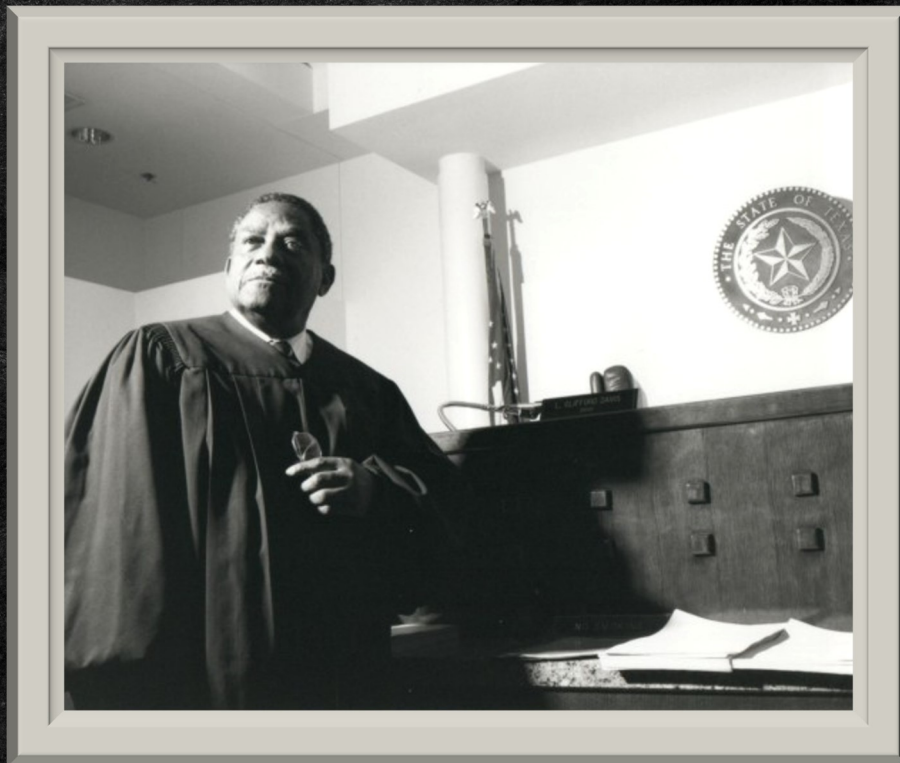
"You can be strident, but not arrogant. You can be forceful without being disrespectful."

-Advice to attorneys from Judge Hicks



"Justice will always be served in my courtroom. I serve with honor, dignity, compassion, and respect."

-Judge Lisa R. Woodard



"Civil rights I define as what society owes you, civil responsibility is what you owe society."

-Judge L. Clifford Davis

Photo Credit: The Black Academy of Arts and Letters/ UNT Libraries Special Collections, The Portal To Texas History

Life After Loss: How Probate Works in Texas

by Brittany Schick

****THIS IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE ADVICE OF AN ATTORNEY****

What Does it Mean to “Probate a Will?”

An application is filed with the probate court to probate a will. The application is usually filed in the county where the deceased lived. Probate courts determine if a will is valid or invalid. The will is not effective until probated. A will may **not** be admitted to probate on or after the fourth anniversary of the testator’s death. [1]

What if there is no Will?

“Intestate” means an individual has died without a will. Probate proceedings may still be required for large assets, numerous debts, or family disputes. Texas is a community property state which makes the probate court proceedings complex, especially if both community and separate property is involved. Additional information for proceedings when there is no will is available from the Texas State Law Library at <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/probate/when-there-is-no-will>. [2]

What are Letters Testamentary and Letters of Administration?

Letters are official court documents that give someone legal authority to act on behalf of a deceased person’s estate. They serve as proof the person’s authority to access bank accounts, transfer or sell property, pay debts and taxes, and distribute assets to heirs. Additional information is available from Texas Law Help at <https://texaslawhelp.org/article/probate-court-basics>. [3]

Letters Testamentary is when the decedent (the deceased person) left a valid will and allows the executor named in the will to act on behalf of the estate. (Texas Estates Code § 306.001 and § 301.002). [4] [5]

Letters of Administration is when the decedent did not leave a will (intestate), or the will didn’t name an executor. A court-appointed administrator manages the estate with close supervision from the court. (Texas Estates Code § 301.051 and § 305.001). [6] [7]

What are Independent and Dependent Administration?

An independent administrator is created by a will or a probate judge. They are responsible for paying the deceased person’s debts, expenses, and taxes — if enough funds are in the estate. They are also responsible for gathering the assets of the person who dies and distributing the remaining assets to the decedent’s beneficiaries.

A dependent administration is when the judge controls the administrator’s actions.

Additional information on estate administration is available from Texas Law Help at <https://texaslawhelp.org/article/estate-administration-in-texas>. [8]

Informal Methods

Muniment of Title — This is a simplified probate process used when the deceased person left a valid will and there are no debts except those secured by real estate. The only purpose of probate is to transfer title to property (such as land or a house). No executor or formal administration is needed. [9]

Small Estate Affidavit — Texas Estates Code, Ch. 205 states the eligibility requirements for a Small Estate Affidavit. Qualifications are no will, the total value of the estate (excluding homestead and exempt property) is \$75,000 or less, no debts owed, and heirs identified and agree. The Small Estate Affidavit can only transfer title to the homestead, not other real property like rental or investment land. [10]

Additional information about informal methods is available at <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/probate/informal-methods>.

References

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2. Texas State Law Library. (2025, November 25). *When there is no will*. Probate Law. Retrieved from <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/probate/when-there-is-no-will>.
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7. Texas Estates Code § 305.001 (West 2025).
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9. Texas State Law Library. (2025, November 10). *Informal methods*. Probate Law. Retrieved from <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/probate/informal-methods>.
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Estate Planning in Texas

by C.K. Hardy

Estate planning can include many items and is helpful for Texans of all ages and financial backgrounds. It is not just about preparing for death, but about ensuring your wishes and protecting your loved ones. A well-crafted estate plan can minimize taxes, avoid probate, and provide peace of mind for you and your family. Below is a non-exhaustive list for someone wanting to know more about some common estate planning tools in Texas.

****THIS IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE ADVICE OF AN ATTORNEY****

Advance Directives

Advance directives allow you to make decisions about your medical care in advance, letting family know your wishes ahead of time and to avoid confusion during end-of-life situations in which you're unable to express those thoughts. Common documents include the Directive to Physicians (living will), Medical Power of Attorney, and Out-of-Hospital Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) orders. These documents can help prevent family conflict during medical emergencies. [1]

Beneficiary Designations

Beneficiary designations let you name who will receive assets like insurance or retirement accounts after your death. In most instances, they bypass probate. Keeping them current ensures your wishes are honored.

Gifts

Texas does not impose a state gift tax, but federal gift tax rules still apply. In 2023, individuals could give up to \$17,000 per recipient annually without triggering federal taxes. Strategic gifting can reduce the taxable value of your estate and support loved ones during your lifetime.[2]

Community Property Agreements

Married couples in Texas can use a Community Property Survivorship Agreement to ensure that property passes directly to the surviving spouse without probate. This agreement must meet formal requirements under Texas Estates Code Chapter 112 and can include real estate and financial accounts.[3]

Funeral and Burial Planning

Planning for funeral and burial expenses can ease the burden on loved ones and ensure your wishes are respected. Prepaid funeral contracts are regulated by the Texas Department of Banking. [4]

Access to Documents and Information

A key part of modern estate planning is making sure trusted individuals can access essential documents and information when they need it most. This includes not only legal papers like wills and deeds, but also digital assets such as online accounts, passwords, and financial records. Creating a secure way to share this information can help avoid confusion.



Joint Tenancy of Property / Right of Survivorship

Joint tenancy with right of survivorship allows property to pass directly to surviving co-owners, bypassing probate. This must be explicitly stated in the deed or agreement. It's a useful tool for simplifying asset transfer but requires careful planning.[5]

Living Trusts

A revocable living trust allows you to manage your assets during your lifetime and distribute them privately after death, avoiding probate. You can serve as your own trustee and retain control. Trusts offer privacy, flexibility, and continuity in estate planning.[6]

Pay-on-Death Accounts

Payable-on-death (POD) accounts allow funds to transfer directly to a named beneficiary upon death, without court involvement. These accounts are easy to set up and provide immediate access to funds for funeral costs or other expenses.[7]

Powers of Attorney

A durable power of attorney lets you appoint someone to manage your financial affairs should you become incapacitated. The medical power of attorney designates someone to make healthcare decisions on your behalf. These documents can help with maintaining control during emergencies.[8]

Transfer on Death Deed (TODD)

A TODD allows you to name a beneficiary for real estate, transferring ownership upon death without probate. It must be recorded before death and can be revoked at any time the transferring party chooses. This tool is especially useful for homeowners seeking a simple estate transfer.[9]

Wills

A will outlines how your assets should be distributed and can name guardians for minor children. In Texas, a valid will must be written, signed by the testator, and witnessed by two individuals over 14. Without a will, state intestacy laws determine asset distribution.[10]

Estate planning is not just for the wealthy. It is for anyone who wants to protect their family, preserve their legacy, and ensure their wishes are honored. For help accessing forms, guides, or legal materials, contact the library. We're here to support your estate planning journey.

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Law Library at the Empowering Seniors Expo

by Colleen Hardy



This year, we had the opportunity to represent the Dell DeHay Law Library at the Empowering Seniors Expo, hosted by Tarrant County Judge, Tim O'Hare and Commissioner, Matt Krause. The event brought together thousands of seniors, caregivers, and community organizations for a day filled with resources, wellness checks, and friendly conversation.

Our booth was stocked with brochures, legal information handouts, and plenty of answers to the kinds of everyday questions seniors often face. Throughout the event, we spoke with attendees about landlord-tenant issues, wills and probate resources, and where to find helpful forms at the library. Many people were surprised (in a good way!) to learn they could walk into the law library and get research help for free.

It was a great chance to connect with the community outside of the library walls, meet people where they are, and remind folks that legal information doesn't have to be intimidating. Having two of us there made it easier to talk with more attendees, share the workload, and enjoy the experience.

By the end of the day, we left with tired feet, empty boxes of handouts, and the good feeling that comes from helping people discover a resource they didn't know they had.



Dell DeHay Law Library Observes 80 Years of Distinguished Service

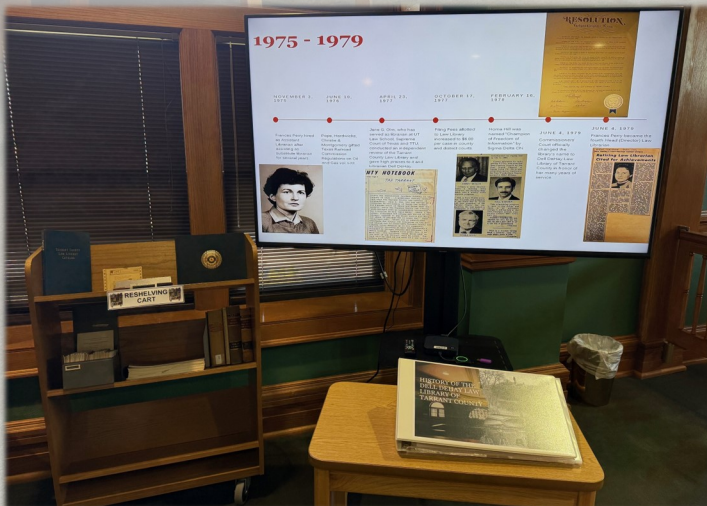


Law Library's Time Capsule

On October 1, 2025, the Dell DeHay Law Library marked its 80th anniversary with a special celebration hosted by library staff for both employees and patrons. The event featured commemorative souvenirs, a photo booth hosted by the Graphics Department with fun props, a historical slideshow showcasing the library's evolution over the decades, and a companion binder detailing its rich history.

To commemorate this milestone, a time capsule was sealed following the event. Departments from across the county contributed items that reflect the county's current work. The capsule will be opened during the library's 100th anniversary in 2045, offering future generations a window into today's history.

As part of the celebration, staff honored the memory of Peggy Martindale, Assistant Librarian for Public Services from 1988 to 2020, who passed away on March 19th, 2025. Guests were invited to write and share their memories of Peggy. Peggy's decades of dedicated service and warm presence made a lasting impact on all who knew her, reminding us all to Keep Persevering!



Photos Courtesy of Amanda Hill





Halloween Theme 2025

Villains in the Volumes



Library Staff: Cara (Maleficent), Amanda (Hamburglar), Nancy (Bride of Chucky), Brittany (Queen of Hearts), Yancy (La Llorona), Deneshia (Witch), and Colleen (Shego)



**Justice of the Peace Precinct 1 Visitors:
Bruce Shelby, Daniella Herrick (as Bruce), Judge Swearingin (Big Tex), and Charlene Hernandez (Judge)**





A Legal Sleigh Ride through Holiday Cases

by Colleen Hardy

From trademark disputes at the North Pole to custody battles involving Santa's itinerary, courts across the country have actually ruled on cases involving Saint Nick himself. So, grab a mug of cocoa and join us for a quick look at Santa's surprising appearances in American case law.

Santa's Workshop, Inc. v. Sterling (1956, N.Y.)

In this mid-century battle of the "North Poles," *Santa's Workshop, Inc.*, a tourist attraction in upstate New York, sued a nearby fur farm for unfair competition after the latter began advertising "Santa's Friendly Animals." The court found that the defendant's use of Santa-themed marketing created customer confusion and awarded damages for unfair competition.

In re Porter (2001, Utah)

One Utah man, who not only looked like Santa but lived the part through charitable work, petitioned to legally change his name to "Santa Claus." The trial court denied the request, but the Utah Supreme Court reversed, ruling that there was no legal reason to deny the change.

Lewis v. O'Day (2008, Ga.)

Yes, there is a real **City of Santa Claus, Georgia**, and yes, they've had their own election disputes. In *Lewis v. O'Day*, a mayoral candidate challenged election irregularities but failed to show evidence of fraud or confusion. The Georgia Supreme Court upheld the results of the election.

Serio v. Serio (1992, Del.)

A Delaware Family Court case tackled the high-stakes issue of *who gets the kids on Christmas morning*. The mother argued that because the children believed in Santa her house should be where they stay for Christmas, but the court gently reminded both parents that Santa can deliver to multiple locations, ordered alternating Christmas mornings, and suggested that the children could leave a note with a map for Santa to know where they would be.

Coston v. Product Movers (1990, E.D. Pa.)

A plaintiff claimed copyright infringement for a poster design showing cotton balls as Santa's beard in an advent calendar. The court held that the *idea* of using cotton balls to make a Santa beard isn't protectable under copyright law. Main lesson here — you can't copyright Christmas spirit (or cotton ball beards).

State v. Hayes (2002, Ohio)

Where defendant displayed an Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles issued ID card with the name of Santa Claus, the court found the defendant could not be convicted of displaying or possessing a fake ID card; defendant did not do so for a fraudulent purposes and had been issued cards with that name since 1982.

Wrapping this up with a bow on top

While these cases bring humor to the legal landscape, they also remind us how the law reaches into every corner of life, even the North Pole. So, as you prepare for the season, remember: whether you're drafting motions or mailing wish lists, a little civility and good cheer can go a long way.

The Tarrant County Law Library wishes everyone a safe and legally compliant holiday season. No trespassing on rooftops, please!



Ask a Librarian

Have a challenging research question or need assistance with navigating a legal database? Our law librarians are here to help. Visit us in person, give us a call, send an email, or use our [Connect with a Law Librarian](#) service!



Suggest A Research Topic

Have an idea for a research guide or workshop?

The Dell DeHay Law Library is looking for topic suggestions to expand our collection of guides and classes—and we want your input. Whether it is a legal area you would like to learn more about or a resource you think others should know, now is your chance to help shape content that supports your research and professional needs.

Submit your ideas to lawlibrary@tarrantcountytexas.gov and let us know what topics you would like to see covered. Thanks and Happy Holidays!

