

Homer Hendrickson – Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: **Homer Hendrickson**

Interviewers: **Jacob Stickel** (archival specialist), **Jennifer Haney Conover** (director)

Date of Interview: 22 August 2023

List of Initials: HH = Homer Hendrickson, JS = Jacob Stickel, JHC = Jennifer Haney Conover

Location of Interview: Warren County Admin Building in Lebanon, Ohio

Transcriber: Keegan Kiley (records center support)

[Begin transcription 00:00:01]

JS: Okay. My name is Jacob Stickel. I am the archival assistant here at the Warren County Records Center. I'm here with my coworker...

JHC: Jen Haney Conover.

JS: A we're here doing the oral history program with the retired employees with mr....

HH: Homer Hendrickson.

JS: Thank you. And today's date is August 22, 2023. Alright we're just gonna go through some initial questions. We have the general background questions here. When and where were you born?

HH: Middletown Hospital (Atrium Medical Center, Middletown, Ohio), January 10, 1942.

JS: Alright. And where'd you grow up?

HH: I grew up in Warren County, Turtlecreek Township (Ohio), the corner of Hendrickson Road (Ohio) and Union Road (Ohio). About a mile east of the Butler County (Ohio) line.

JS: Alright very local then. (HH: Yep.) So, were you local the entire time? Where have you lived?

HH: Well Warren County, Greene County (Ohio), Montgomery County (Ohio), back to Warren County, and now back to Montgomery County.

JS: Hey alright! What jobs did you have prior to working at Warren County?

HH: Well out of high school I started working here for a surveyor named Charles Guard here in Lebanon, 1960. 1962 I went to a firm called Markey and Hasselbring, who was at the time in the process of doing a preliminary survey for Interstate 71, and I worked on that. 1964 I went to the city of Xenia (Ohio) Engineering Department and in 1969 I went to a Paul Rodenbeck & Associates, engineer and surveyor company. 1969 and 1973 I got my surveyors license and then 1984 came to Warren County.

JS: Alright. Worked on a full amount of jobs right before hand.

JHC: So, you were able to be hands on with the beginnings of the interstate highway when it was coming through, that's awesome!

HH: 1960, when I graduated high school, 75 (Interstate 75) was just opening. (JHC: Yeah.) It was already constructed, 71 (Interstate 71) was just in the very early planning.

JS: Oh man, well that's great to hear. Right now we have the departmental questions more specific to which you worked at Warren County. Which departments did you work for during your time here?

HH: Map Room which was a division of the Engineer's Office. And we were creators of the current property maps for the auditor.

JS: Alright. So, they can evaluate land and everything. Did you have any additional affiliation with the Auditor's Office?

HH: Well, we worked with them on a daily basis. Like today the auditor, and the recorder, and the Map Room are all kinda working one group.

JHC: So, you guys worked with the early vision of GIS to make the maps and whatnot and the different subdivisions for I guess what now is the GIS department. But you of course obviously...

HH: I was here at the very beginning of the GIS. Actually, it started over on Silver Street (Lebanon, Ohio). The very beginnings of it.

JS: Alright, and how long did you work for Warren County? What year did you start?

HH: Started in 1984 to 2008, twenty-four years.

JS: Alright, and where were these departments located through the years you were here?

HH: Well, in 1984 we were 320 Silver Street (Lebanon, Ohio) ...

...and we moved to here 406 Justice Drive (Lebanon, Ohio) in 2000.

JS: How was that move? Pretty tenuous or chaotic at the time?

HH: It was chaotic yep. Sure was! In fact, we got everything moved and the crew, our department was here- I'd say that first day of the move we were here till almost midnight I think. We had to get prepared to be open the next day. (JS: Oh goodness.)

JHC: So, what was your role at the time during that move? Were you the... (HH: I was hired as supervisor of the Map Room.) So, you were the supervisor the whole time you were here. (HH: Correct.) Awesome. Had there been a supervisor in that position beforehand?

HH: Oh yes. (JHC: Okay.) Don Tevis (Donald Tevis) was the supervisor at that time. He retired and he was also a surveyor. And he worked with me for two weeks before he left on retirement. So, I got thrown into the fire at that point.

JHC: That's great! Now I was just curious if you had been essentially the boss the whole time you were here, or if you had to work your way up, but it sounds like you had quite a bit of experience before you came back to Warren County.

HH: Correct.

JS: Definitely. What were some of your daily task as a tax map supervisor?

HH: Well, we had to deal with the public a good bit, they have lots of questions about different things that are happening in development concerning their property lines, their deeds, and so forth. And then from the actual work standpoint we reviewed surveys, plats, annexations, and reviewed all of the legal descriptions that came in for recording and identified them by person so that the auditors could transfer the property and the recorders could index it for the recording.

JS: Alright. And what is something that people don't know or didn't know about that position?

HH: Probably just how actually involved it all is working with so many different departments. Before they could bring a map or a plat to us, they had to go through planning. Had to go through Health Department to make sure they could have sewer or water or whatever they needed. Engineer's Office for road frontage, all kinds a things they had to coordinate, and then they had to do all of those things, and then get a surveyor to do the actual survey before they could cut a piece of property off.

JS: Oh my goodness, I had no idea that all that was involved either. And how often did you interact with the public? It sounds like frequently. (HH: Excuse me?) How often did you interact with the public?

HH: Well probably about every other five minutes. There's a lot of the public that brought their own documents in for recording. A lot of it came from lawyers and title examiners, but public would just pop in with questions that they were dealing with, didn't know how to approach it, and basically we tried to just guide them in the right direction.

JS: Oh yeah, I would say that down here we are very familiar with that. What was some of the challenges that you've had to deal with some members of the public coming in and attempting to help them as best you could?

HH: Challenges? Well, sometimes people didn't like what you told them. (JHC: They still don't like what you tell them. Yeah.)

Time 00:10:00 Mark

It's probably the main thing. We never had any problem dealing with the other offices, everybody always worked real good together, it seemed like. The Map Room didn't really seem to have problems, there were some departments that would get nasty phone calls about things at different times, especially taxes.

JHC: So right now we get a lot of people call asking us for historic information about landlines and whatnot so different lines of subdivisions and whatnot. Did you guys get a lot of that as well?

HH: Yeah. (JHC: Okay.) Right. I haven't been in the Commissioner's Office for few years but there's a big map on the front row there that I think is probably the oldest (JHC: Mm-hmm.) property line map available. It's the oldest one that I've seen anyway. But we had I think it was something like 1859 maybe.

JHC: Its 50s so I think it might be- it's '56 or '57 cause we actually, the engineer Neil (Neil F. Tunison), gosh this would be before my time, we found a couple more that they found. (HH: Did they?) Yeah. And after the interview today I'll show you, we had them conserved and worked on and deacidified and brought to as good a glory, but I think that map is the same one we have downstairs as well. They're so fascinating, and there is so much amazing information in those maps as well.

HH: There was the Warren County Atlas, there was about three different publications of it which showed properties and ownership, but as far as I can remember the first tax map was actually created in 1910 and those maps I think are still up there. Unless you guys have them down here.

JHC: Yeah. So, I worked with Bob (Bob Fox), was one of the first things that we worked together with. They wanted to have them digitized so we helped digitize them, so they didn't have to access them often. (HH: Right.) And then we had them deacidified, brought down to the basement, and put them in acid free boxes so that if you guys, as in the Tax Room or Engineer's Office, wanted to utilize them for some reason you could, but just for the general public they could have access to the actual digital copies, and they are super neat.

HH: And then there's two or three more sets of tax maps that exist between 1910 and the time GIS (JHC: Mm-hmm.) actually started. Now I don't know that much about how that's retained now but I would imagine they're keeping a shot every year for history.

JHC: Yeah. They do and its- as someone who works with every department head and elected official in my role, it's interesting to see the different departments of GIS work so much with the Tax Map division still and the Engineer's Office because all of that stuff is so connected. And especially as things are much more digitized, and they're utilizing computer satellite information and whatnot. (HH: Yeah.) For me I think it's interesting just to see- cause we try to get a screenshot a lot more of that now so we have a lot more data online as oppose to (HH: Oh yeah!) just the physical documents. So, you probably experienced some of that while you were here going more electronic and utilizing the satellites. Could you talk a little bit about that transition?

HH: It's nowhere near what it is now. I can sit down and pull up a computer and just see everything about a property that would need to know: the recordings, the tax information, just something we didn't have then. It was a very slow process I'm going to say probably started in about '95 that's just a guess...

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...over in Silver Street. And I'm not even sure, I think Nick Nelson (Nicholas Nelson) was already out of here, I think he was- I'm not sure if he was elected in '96, and then it just gradually progressed. Sometimes you think it's taken forever but it does, it just takes a long time to get all that into proper format and everything.

JS: Oh yeah! I'm sure there's a large process involved.

JHC: Now we just did- Jacob (Jacob Stickel) and one of my supervisors that's under me Tori Otten they just did an exhibit that opened up on the second floor. And we have actually one of the first surveyors of the county, was an auditor actually, think he ended up becoming the first auditor or a tax accessor or something like that. So, if you get a chance, I would highly recommend checking that out cause Jacob actually digitized the 1891 atlas, it was one of the older atlases, and utilized the tax maps and the survey maps for the background of the exhibit that they have up on the wall. It's really fascinating!

JS: If you'd like afterwards we have the picture we just set up we could show you the exhibit or whatever you like. (HH: Okay. Sounds good.) Alright, now that we're offtrack I apologize. Are there coworkers, managers, or others you've worked with that have had an impact on you, and who are they?

HH: Well, there's a lot of people who have had an impact but so many that were good to work with. I'm not going to try to mention my employees because there were so many, and I'd know I'd leave out some good ones. I probably had close to two dozen different people in that twenty-four years, off and on. But working with the elected officials Les Spaeth (Leslie Spaeth) and Nick Nelson and then into Matt Nolan even, right before I left. (JHC: Yeah.) And recorders Edna Bowyer and Beth Deckard, everybody was extremely helpful in getting to you what you needed to get the answers they needed. That's the thing it took work, people working together. And then we had questions of legal matter a lot of times. I had Tim Oliver (Timothy Oliver) as an advisor, he became a judge. Mike Powell (Michael Powell) became a judge, and then there is Bruce McGary and Chris Watkins (Christopher Watkins) that are still here now I believe. (JHC: Yep, they both are.) And always very good on giving advice and keeping us out of trouble.

JHC: What engineers did you work for?

HH: Rick Pendleton (Craig Rick Pendleton) hired me in '84 and then Neil Tunison was his- about '92 Neil became his assistant engineer and then Neil became the engineer sometime in the 90s, '94, '96 somewhere around there. I would say the biggest impact came from a man that worked at the Engineer's Office named Jerry Stiles (Gerald Stiles). He knew everything there was to know, he had started in the Map Room...

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...when he was still in high school, and eventually got promoted out of there and into the Engineer's Office where he kind of overseen a lot of departments and divisions involved with the Engineer's Office. He was a member of the planning board, zoning commissions, and things like that. But he passed away

in 2000 and I think at the time he had about forty-five years of employment and he was not retiring, he just kept going!

JHC: I am familiar with that name, I didn't know a lot about him, I know he was here kind of a institutional knowledge, he had a ton of knowledge and worked with a lot of people. I've heard that name several times with some of the interviews we've had.

HH: Well for years I've wished that we had an opening here (points to head) so you could download everything you got in your mind to someone else and upload what they have. And low and behold the darn stuff is coming around now with AI and I'm not too sure it's a good thing! But after Jerry passed away the fella that was given his job used to say when something tough came up, he'd go out to the graveyard and talk to him!

JHC: Aww that's a great story! Aww, that's great.

JS: Were there any other memorable projects that you've worked on through the years? Maybe with Stiles?

HH: Well, a big project was Mason-Montgomery Road (Ohio) (JHC: Oh yeah.) widening which took an awful lot of time and work and led to the locating of PNG down there. And then annexations, there were so many annexations from all the growth that was going on. (JHC: Oh, you got to see it all firsthand especially with the interstates developing.) Right. (JHC: Oh man.) Lebanon, Mason (Ohio), Springboro (Ohio), Franklin (Ohio), even that old burgs like Harveysburg (Ohio) and Corwin (Ohio) would have annexations and development going on and it continues, it's still going on today. Middletown (Ohio) come across the county line, now I don't know what, they have quite a few subdivisions out there in western Warren County.

JS: I bet they do.

JHC: Yeah, we're still I believe the number two or three fastest growing county in the state. Just behind Delaware (Ohio) and- Butler (Ohio) was ahead of us for a little bit but I think that's- we kind of go back and forth between Delaware, Butler and somewhere up near Cuyahoga (Ohio), it's not actual Cuyahoga it's somewhere up there. It's incredible how quick even still we're still developing.

JS: Oh yeah and speaking of Warren County in general on to those questions. What were some of your highlights of your time here with the county?

HH: Well, highlights, I would say just the way all the departments seem to work together so well. Working with the public and the researchers that came in doing work. It just seemed like everybody worked together as a unit. Pretty much the highlight as far as something other than the actual work.

JS: Fair.

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JHC: Feel that.

JS: What was the county like when you started versus when you left?

HH: Well, when I started working here it was still very rural, '84- well like I said 75 just opened, 71 was in primary stage, but in 1960 when I first started working for Charlie Guard (Charles Guard) if we came to the courthouse to do research there were no reproduction equipment. If you needed a copy of a deed, you hand wrote it, if you needed a map, which Jerry Stiles was in there hand drawing them on the old tax map, if you needed the map you took a piece of tracing paper and you traced off what you needed. There was hardly anybody in the building. There was the recorder, and there was the auditor, and the treasurer and they kinda handle everything themselves. They didn't have to have employees because there wasn't that much paperwork coming in.

JHC: Did you work with Pearl (Pearl Graham) too sometimes?

HH: Pearl Graham was the recorder at that time yes. But I didn't really work with her other than finding something that I needed help with or whatever like that.

JHC: We just haven't talked to very many people who worked with Pearl and really Edna, mostly people worked with the previous recorder before Linda (Linda Oda), Beth Deckard. It's just interesting to hear you working with some of these other individuals that we haven't heard as much about.

HH: Yeah well, I don't know exactly when the change occurred between Pearl and Edna... (JHC: I think it was some time in the 60s, maybe '64.) ...when I came back in '84 Edna was obviously here at that time. In '84 like I said it was still very rural and small. There were cases of sheriff sales an example- if I'm not mistaken Jim Collins (James Collins) was the sheriff either when I came or very soon thereafter and when he had a sheriff's sale he would come in the office and research it himself, go out view the property, do an appraisal himself. The sheriff nowadays does not have time to do anything like that and by the time 2005, 2004 in around there I think we were having maybe thirty-five, forty sheriff sales a month and the

sheriff had three appraisers that they hired. Now I don't know whether they are still in that mode or not but I'm sure there's still a lot of sales going on. As the interest rates start to raise they'll be back again.

JS: They sure would. Did anything significant happen within the county government during your time as an employee?

HH: Well, the GIS was obviously significant yeah, and moving into this building. Like I said, the initiation of GIS we didn't really know- or I didn't really understand what it was all going to amount to at the beginning, but it's taken what probably thirty years in process now. And I don't know whether you say it's complete, of course it has to be updated continually. Those would be most significant I think.

JS: If you don't mind me asking, do you know where you were during 9/11? I know you just moved in.

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HH: Oh yeah. I was in the Map Room. I heard Kelly (Kelly Walker) tell- I went home and got a TV.

JHC: Oh, you brought a TV in from home. (HH: Mm-hmm.) Wow.

HH: I just lived about five miles from here at the time. We were just doing a normal day and Jim Bove (James R. Jim Bove) worked in the Auditor's Office, and I have no idea now how they heard it whether he was listening to the radio or what, but he came over into the Map Room and told us what had happened. We got the radio on real quick and like I said I went home and got a TV and we kinda kept track of it. I had it back in time to see the second building go down. I also remember being at work over in Silver Street when the USS Cole got bombed. (JHC: Oh yeah!) What else, who else died? There's a number of Map Room employees that are deceased that I worked with. Of course, Rick Pendleton is now. (JHC: What year did he pass on?) About either '21 or '22 I'm not positive. (JHC: So recently.) It wasn't very long ago, no. (JHC: I did not know that. Okay.) Think his wife died about six months before he did. Something like that.

JS: Yeah, that's how it goes.

JHC: Yeah, cause I know he was engineer quite a long time. I mean so many of the records we have in the back have his name or Neil's name on there. But a lot of them have Rick's name on there.

HH: Yeah. I think he was- well no Rick was actually appointed initially to replace another engineer who may have passed away, I can't remember now the name. Stan Markey (Stanley Markey) was engineer (JHC: Mm-hmm.), I think Rick actually replaced him (JHC: Okay.), but I won't guarantee it.

JHC: That's what Markey the road that's who that's named after, that area where they have the majority of the highway department and engineer.

JS: Okay.

JHC: Yep.

JS: What are some of the most important things that you've learned from working in Warren County?

HH: Well, I guess life, it's experience like that. I had been an outdoors surveyor and worked obviously around some public, for the public, and coming into a building like this where there was public constantly and having to interact with the other employees. It's just a learning experience.

JS: I bet yeah, especially dealing with the public you mentioned earlier. My goodness! What do you miss the most about working for Warren County?

HH: Seeing the people. My brain is on a downfall. I noticed I don't have to use it anymore and I'm not keeping sharp like I used to be. But just being around all the people...

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...and friendships that were developed and that kind of thing. The work I actually don't miss that.

JS: That sounds about right and on that what advice do you have to give to current county employees?

HH: Well, I would say you just need to do the job and keep your nose to the grindstone. I used to tell the kids, my employees, all the time if you don't learn something everyday you're not trying. (JS: I like the sound of that.) I had quite a few young ones that were definitely a different world. I grew up in the beginning of the rock and roll and I get to telling them stories about something and "Well Homer was that before cassettes", yes it was before.

JHC: Now the kids don't know what a CD is.

HH: Most of everybody I had was younger than me. But we was able to get through it alright, I never had any problem with them.

JS: That's good to hear, that was gonna be one of my questions. Was there any additional information you'd like to share about your time as an employee here?

HH: No, I don't believe so, I think you pretty well covered it.

JS: That's great! Thank you for your time and this will conclude our recording.

[End transcript 00:37:20]