



The Miami News — LENNY COHEN

Gordon Winslow gets the honor of sifting through stockpiled court documents

Scholar to review court records for history's sake

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Nuggets of Miami history lie buried amid millions of pages of official documents administered by the Dade County Court Clerk's Office.

Starting Tuesday, Gordon Winslow's job will be to mine that invaluable lode.

Court Clerk Richard Brinker, who as the county's chief records custodian is hoping to maintain a part of Dade's heritage, has named Winslow as the court's official archivist/historian. Winslow's \$27,000-a-year job, apparently the first of its kind in Florida, will be to identify and preserve for public inspection any records that have historical significance.

Winslow, a trained historian who has worked as a Dade court clerk since 1974, will have primary control over court and land records, Brinker said. He also will work with the Dade State Attorney's Office, Metro police and county building and zoning officials to uncover other important records, Brinker said.

Record collecting — a tedious endeavor to some — is considered a challenge to Winslow, who has devoted much of his private life to collecting and cataloging newspapers and various government records about Miami's Cuban community.

"This work gives you a sense of satisfaction of doing something important," said Winslow, whose extensive files have aided journalists and historians from across the country. "When you preserve a record, you've preserved history."

The county's new \$1 million Records Center at 9350 N.W. 12th St. will serve as a repository for the documents and a viewing room for the public, Brinker said.

"There are about 73,000 boxes there, each a filing cabinet drawer," Brinker said. "We have taken them from the dank, cold basement of the (downtown) courthouse and secured them there behind burglar alarms and with a fire sprinkler system."

One of the crucial decisions that has yet to be worked out is defining exactly what a historical document is, Brinker said.

"There are no set guidelines now, but Gordon's gotten about a half dozen historical societies and universities to agree to sit down with him and help him evaluate that," Brinker said.

Winslow said he already has earmarked about 400 cases for preservation.

"They are cases involving individuals related to the Watergate break-in or the Kennedy assassination or organized crime," Winslow said. "Cases that have proven to generate a continuing public interest."