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Clerk's Corner  
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### **A look at the first Clerk of the Court – William E. Thomas**

In recognition of the upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Arizona's statehood in February 2012, the article below is a summary about William E. Thomas, who was the first Clerk of the Superior Court in Maricopa County. He served in office from 1912-1914.

William E. Thomas was born in Lynchburg, Virginia on November 8, 1852. He received his education at Roanoke College in Virginia. Prior to graduating, he accepted a position as deputy clerk of the County and Circuit Courts, and also acted at the same time as deputy recorder. He was employed there for three years. In 1874, he took a business course at the Bryant & Stratton's Business College in Baltimore, Maryland and after graduating he became a bookkeeper in Baltimore. In 1876 he entered the grocery business for two years. In the Spring of 1880 he married Hallie Pleasants Orme from Baltimore. She was the great granddaughter of General Jeremiah Crabb, who was of revolutionary war fame. Soon after marriage the couple moved out West to seek larger possibilities. They moved to Leadville, Colorado where Thomas was appointed as the deputy county recorder of Lake County. He later became the postal carrier for the Leadville Post Office. Due to the failing health of his wife, the couple decided to make a change in climate and surroundings. They moved for a short time to Los Angeles County, California before moving to Phoenix, Arizona in October 1883.

In Phoenix, Thomas got involved with town affairs. For a time he served as a deputy sheriff as well as being associated with the Maricopa County Assessor's Office. For three years he was the deputy recorder of Maricopa County. From 1888-1891 Thomas was involved in the real estate and loan business and was successful in this and other enterprises. He purchased a 160-acre ranch one-and-a-half miles north of Phoenix (at which time Van Buren was the northern edge of Phoenix) on Central Avenue and ran it while he continued with his other activities until he was appointed the postmaster of Phoenix by President Grover Cleveland in 1894.

In an article in the *Historical and Biographical Record of the Territory of Arizona* it says, "William E. Thomas' life has been characterized by constancy of purpose, conscientiousness, undoubted ability and energy, and as a natural result, he is one of the substantial men of Maricopa County, and has the respect and esteem of all acquainted with him." In an article in the *Portrait and Biographical Record of Arizona* it says Thomas "has won the confidence and esteem of all who come within the radius of his good-will and devotion to the general well-being, and that while he has witnessed many changes in the general aspect of an originally wild and uncultivated region, the public estimation of his honesty of purpose and character has never undergone a change."

The available information on Thomas was written before he took office as Clerk of the Court in 1912. It is unknown why his term only lasted two years or how he became the Clerk. In looking at his prominence in Phoenix and the large amount of land he owned in the Central Phoenix area, it is highly likely that Thomas Road is named after the very first Clerk of the Court in Maricopa County. Perhaps one of the *Maricopa Lawyer's* readers or local historians can say for sure.