

Rooker Report

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Fiscal Review

Support Payments Top \$15.5 Million

The standard of living for the county's children of divorce continued to improve during the past fiscal year with circuit court-ordered support payments topping the \$15 million mark for the first time.

Actual receipts totaled \$15,590,895 -- an 18 percent increase over the previous year when \$13.2 million was distributed to more than 7,500 custodial parents. The exact number of cases sharing in the latest distribution had not been determined, but because of intensified enforcement, officials believe more children are suffering less.

In addition to payments received and disbursed by the circuit court clerk, millions of dollars more are funneled through the juve-

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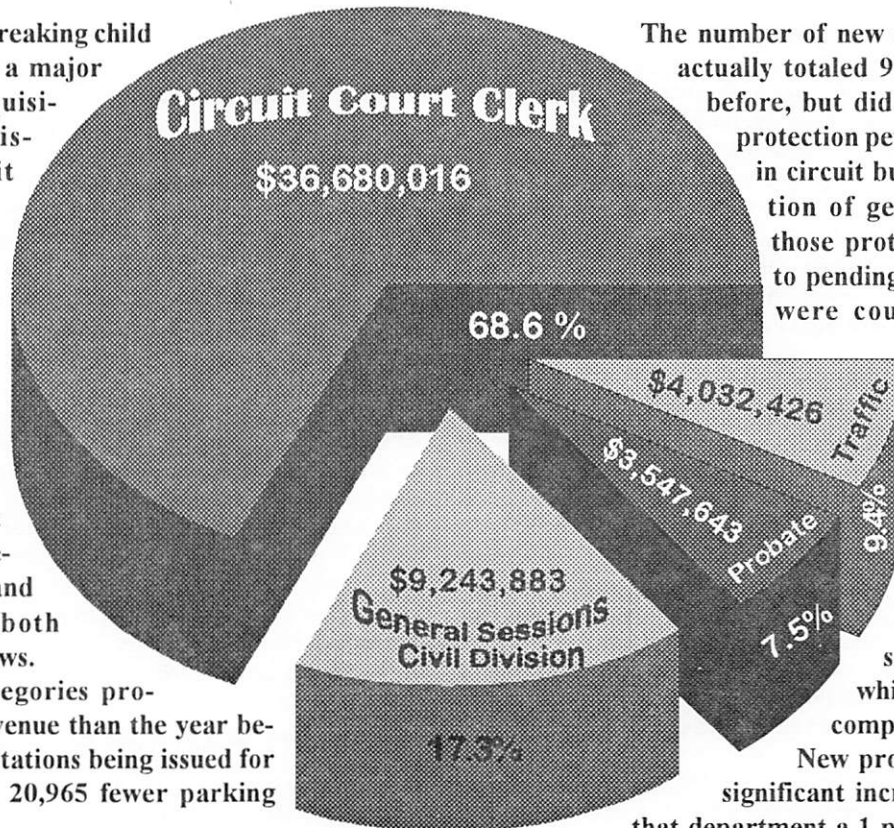
Bolstered by record-breaking child support payments and a major government land acquisition, revenue administered by the Circuit Court Clerk hit \$53.5 million during the fiscal year ending June 30.

That was 14 percent higher than the previous year and came despite a decline in traffic-generated revenue, which fell for the first time in the wake of reduced seat belt fines and less enforcement of both moving and parking laws.

Combined traffic categories produced \$279,993 less revenue than the year before with 4,868 fewer citations being issued for moving violations and 20,965 fewer parking tickets.

Still, the Traffic Violations Bureau maintained a 9.4 percent share of the total revenue pie with \$4,032,426, including monies paid through the office for Metro code violations.

New case filings in the three other departments under the fiduciary umbrella of clerk Richard R. Rooker -- circuit court, general sessions civil and probate -- reported fractional increases, resulting in greater revenue contributions than the previous fiscal year.



The number of new cases in circuit court actually totaled 958 less than the year before, but did not include order of protection petitions previously filed in circuit but now under jurisdiction of general sessions. Only those protection orders related to pending domestic cases (154) were counted in the circuit caseload while the lower courts pre-

sided over 1,547. Because of a differently structured reporting system, most order of protection petitions are not included in the sessions caseload total, which rose by 254 for the comparison period.

New probate filings showed a significant increase at 2,100, giving that department a 1 percent increase in the revenue pie split.

But the huge \$7.7 million growth in circuit court transactions overshadowed gains and losses in other areas.

Most meaningful was an astounding 18 percent increase in the amount of child support payments, almost twice the growth rate of previous years. The record pay-in of \$15.59 million reflects the strength of recent unified efforts to bring deadbeat parents face to face with their financial

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Fi\$cal Review

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obligations to their children (see related story).

Almost one-third of the \$36.68 million circuit court revenue line was provided by a \$12 million sum tendered by the Metropolitan Government as payment for land parcels in the Bells Bend area to be used for a county landfill site. The transaction came in response to a condemnation action approved by the court.

Monies paid into Rooker's four-department operation are distributed to a variety of areas, such as trust funds, investments, court costs, child support and fines. The state legislature sets the amount of fees applicable to the type of services rendered and those funds go toward paying operational costs.

Revenue generated by the fees always exceeds the amount necessary to defray operational costs, thereby making the circuit court clerk's office self-sufficient and producing a surplus that is turned over to the Metro general fund. Rooker surrendered \$1,415,000 in excess fees during the past fiscal year, a surplus record for the office.

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CIRCUIT COURT--Productivity was the key word in the six circuit court divisions during the past 12 months as judges implemented new procedural rules to expedite caseloads. As a result, there were more cases concluded than new ones filed in both civil tort and divorce suits.

The courts finalized 3,860 civil cases during the year, compared with the filing of 3,710 new ones. A total of 3,808 divorce cases were brought to conclusion and replaced by 3,787 new filings.

The number of concluded civil cases included 132 decided by juries.

Plaintiffs prevailed in two-thirds of the jury trials, winning judgments in 82 cases for an aggregate \$9,643,549. Defendants prevailed in 41 trials while four cases ended in hung juries and five resulted in mistrials.

GENERAL SESSIONS--Successful claimants in the \$10,000-and-under courts realized a banner year in the collection of judgments with a record \$6,020,858 being paid through the clerk. Interestingly, the half-million-dollar increase over the previous year came with 2,523 fewer garnishments, an indication of improved community economic conditions.

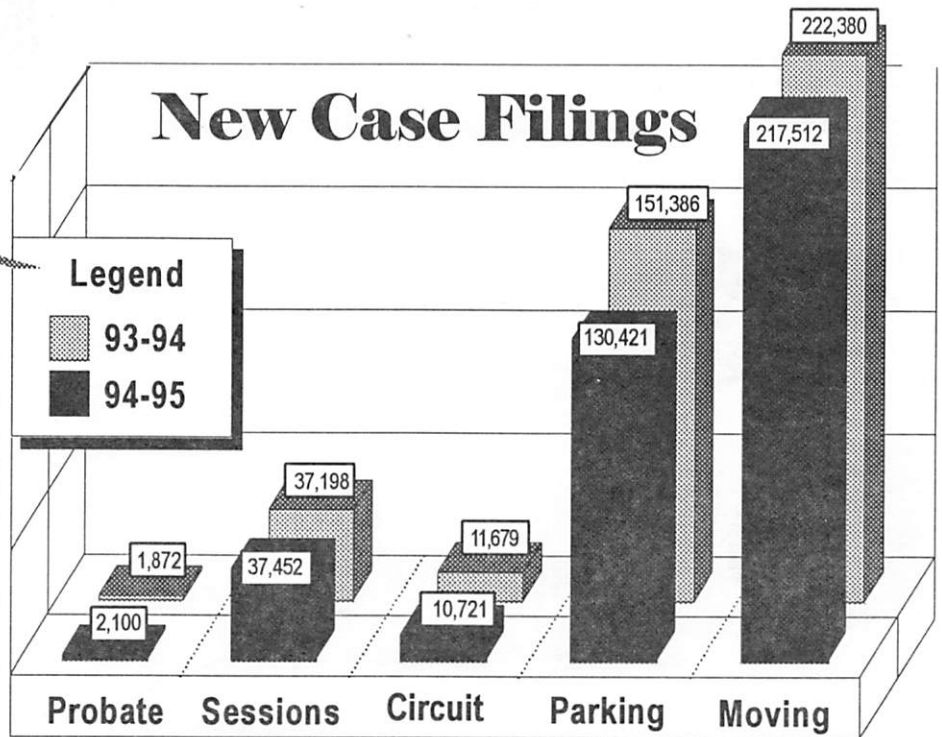
However, the number of new cases being filed with the clerk reflected a slight increase over last year's 37,198 total. There were 37,452 new complaints, not counting the heavy and steadily-rising number of protection order petitions.

While the 1,547 order of protection cases heard by the lower courts during the year represented a record, new laws that went into effect this month are expected to swell domestic violence caseloads even more with easier access to judicial remedy and more protection for victims.

Meantime, a state law implemented last year allowing judges to impose \$50 fines for protection order violations has not been effectively put into practice. At last report, not a single fine had been collected statewide. Hence, community domestic violence education programs, which were to be financed by the fine monies, have not gotten off the ground.

TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS--When the state legislature reduced the penalties for multiple seat belt offenses last year, revenue from traffic laws was bound to drop. The intent of the law obviously was to punish first-time offenders with a \$10 fine instead of a customary warning. But in revising

New Case Filings



the fine structure for multiple offenses from \$25 and \$50 to \$20, the lawmakers effectively weakened the law and the revenue it produced.

While seat belt offenses are not listed independently of other moving traffic violations for accounting purposes, it is difficult to estimate the loss of revenue to Metro. But the drop has been significant, both in fine revenue and in seat belt school enrollments. Coupled with sharp reductions in the number of citations issued by the police department and by parking meter patrol personnel, the revenue decrease is deserving of remedial action.

The one bright spot for the traffic bureau was an increase in revenue generated by the warrant office, which tracks down and collects past-due accounts. The office brought in \$1,486,074, an increase of almost \$21,000 over the previous year.

PROBATE--New cases filed in our probate office do not necessarily reflect the death rate for persons with wills. A number of legal proceedings are incorporated under the heading, including petitions for guardianship, conservatorships, name changes and letters of administration. Therefore, caseload increases, such as the 228 hike posted during the past fiscal year, are not considered morbid, but reflect growing awareness by the general public of rights and procedures involving estate settlements.

New computer equipment installed last year was beneficial to providing efficient service in the receipt of 2,100 new cases and final disposition of 2,526 pending cases, including 1,104 outdated ones that were retired for lack of activity.

Support Payments From Page 1

nile court system and direct payment agreements.

Historically, annual child support payments through the court system have grown at a rate of about 10 percent. The 18 percent hike reflects the impact of a marriage between the courts and private enforcers to make deadbeat parents accountable.

Court clerks across Tennessee are currently readying a statewide computer network that will enhance collections even more. The internet is modeled after the system designed and long utilized by our office. Through linkup information sharing, nonpaying defendants will be easier to locate, along with pertinent data regarding employment. Wage assignment has been effectively utilized by the courts as an automatic action against noncomplying defendants.

WEAPONS CHECK

Is courthouse security paying off? Here's 7,508 reasons to believe it is

For more than a year and a half now, nothing has been going on at the Metro Courthouse.

Nothing, that is, in the way of violence.

In times like these, when respect for property and human life is not what it used to be, "nothing" is really something.

Unlike many of her sister cities, Nashville has been spared the experience of bloodshed in the courtrooms. But when that prospect was brought into focus by sporadic acts of courtroom violence elsewhere, city fathers decided against letting their luck run out.

In November of 1993, an ounce of prevention came in the form of an elaborate security system that has helped remove tempta-

tion for anyone bent on causing trouble.

A complete list of those temptations appears in the shaded area at right. It represents all items intercepted and prevented from entry into the courthouse commons.

While each item on the list is considered a potential weapon, those not classified as being illegal were held at security checkpoints and returned to their owners upon leaving the courthouse. Persons attempting to enter the building with dangerous or illegal weapons were arrested.

In all, 7,508 suspicious items had been intercepted by the Wackenhut Security screening process through the month of May. The list grows with each passing day.

Heart Surgery, Stroke Befall Needy Guard

The ever-present smile of Brenda Aldridge has been missing from the courthouse security team since mid-May when she was befallen with serious health problems.

On May 19, the 50-year-old Wackenhut Security employee underwent emergency heart valve replacement surgery at Baptist Hospital.

Because she had no health insurance, the critical urgency of her condition coupled with her inability to pay qualified her as a charity patient.

Caring co-workers took up a collection at the courthouse entrances to help with her other living expenses. But the campaign was brief and not much money was collected.

It seemed that things could not get much worse for the pleasant lady whose personality helped brighten days for courthouse employees and visitors.

But things *did* get worse.

On July 3, Ms. Aldridge, who is single and lives alone, suffered a stroke as she was recovering from the heart surgery at her home in Ashland City.



BRENDA ALDRIDGE
Courthouse Security Guard

At last report, her condition had improved to the point that she could feed herself, but she was unable to speak.

Capt. Pat Walling, supervisor of courthouse security for Wackenhut, checks on Ms. Aldridge daily.

Walling said Ms. Aldridge has made application for insurance through Tenn-Care, but that no decision has been reached as to her eligibility.

Meantime, the bills keep coming while Ms. Aldridge faces the daily challenges associated with her health condition.

Persons wishing to help Ms. Aldridge through financial contribution should contact Captain Walling at the courthouse security station.

"I will gladly see that she gets any money that is donated," Walling said. "God bless anyone who finds it in his heart to help."

-B-	
Batons	5
Boxcutters	532
Brass knuckles	17
Bullets	405
Butterfly knives	17
-C-	
Cans of beer	3
Chains (large)	1
Chair legs	2
Corkscrews	1
-D-	
D rings	4
Darts	3
-E-	
Eyepunches	25
-F-	
Fireworks	3
-G-	
Guns (loaded)	15
Gun cigarette lighters	8
-H-	
Hammers	3
Handcuffs	230
Hat pins (large)	309
-I-	
Ice picks	1
-K-	
Knitting needles	2
Knives (concealed)	1
Knives (gun-shaped)	1
Knives (hunting)	1
Knives (pocket)	3,625
-M-	
Mace	1,551
-N-	
Nails (long)	39
Nail Files	3
-P-	
Persuaders	33
Pipes (large)	1
Pliers	4
-R-	
Razor blades	9
Razors (straight)	20
-S-	
Safety pins (large)	235
Scissors	306
Screwdrivers (large)	14
Screwdrivers (regular)	44
Spearheads	10
Spurs	4
-T-	
Table forks	8
Toy guns	6
-V-	
Vodka (fifth)	1
-W-	
WD40 (large can)	1
Wire cutters	1
Wrenches (large)	4

Two-Bit Error

Litigation tax on original civil case filings in General Sessions court increased to \$17.75 on July 1. We erroneously reported in our June edition that the new \$3 surcharge imposed by the state legislature would bring the tax to \$17.50. Please excuse our miscalculation.

DATA BANK

Statistics compiled for the month of June

Case Information

Circuit Court

New Civil Cases Filed	322
Civil Cases Concluded	351
New Divorce Cases Filed	379
Divorce Cases Closed	269

General Sessions Civil

New Cases Filed	3,189
Executions Issued	2,424
Judgments Collected	\$547,338
Orders of Protection Petitions	170

Probate Court

New Cases Filed	195
Cases Closed	130
Cases Retired	587

Traffic Violations

Moving Citations	16,319
Parking Violations	9,993
Total Fines Collected	\$304,469
Nullifications	1,641
Nullification Fees Collected	\$14,769

Circuit Court Jury Trial Verdicts

Week of June 5

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
91C-479	Medical Malpractice	6th	Defendant
93C-3589	Auto Accident	1st (P)	\$25,000
93C-2086	Auto Accident	2nd (P)	\$40,000
93C-2036	Auto Accident	3rd (P)	\$7,252

Week of June 19

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
94C-1894	Auto Accident	3rd (P)	\$1,500
94C-4066	Auto Accident	6th (P)	\$10,003

Week of June 26

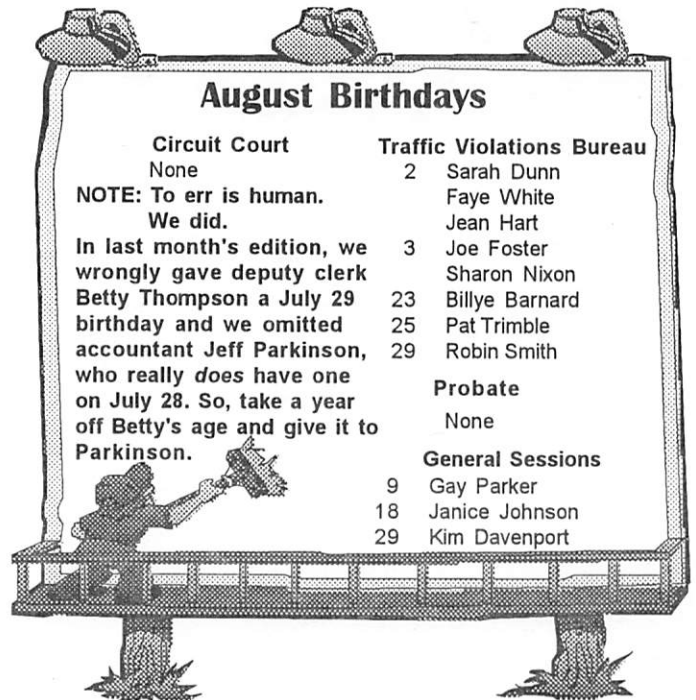
Case	Type	Court	Verdict
93C-1328	Auto Accident	2nd (P)	\$20,000
92C-3264	Auto Accident	5th (P)	\$13,570
94C-209	Auto Accident	3rd (P)	\$2,500
92C-554	Fraud	6th (P)	\$21,250
93C-1290	Auto Accident	1st (P)	\$2,500
93C-2821	Assault	6th (P)	\$158,000

Rooker Report

Published by the Davidson County Circuit Court Clerk's Office
506 Metro Courthouse, Nashville, TN 37201

Established by George L. Rooker (1929-1993),
(Circuit Court Clerk, 1968-1993)

Richard R. Rooker Circuit Court Clerk
Gene Baker Editor



August Birthdays

Circuit Court	Traffic Violations Bureau
None	2 Sarah Dunn
NOTE: To err is human. We did.	Faye White
In last month's edition, we wrongly gave deputy clerk Betty Thompson a July 29 birthday and we omitted accountant Jeff Parkinson, who really does have one on July 28. So, take a year off Betty's age and give it to Parkinson.	Jean Hart
	3 Joe Foster
	Sharon Nixon
	23 Billye Barnard
	25 Pat Trimble
	29 Robin Smith
	Probate
	None
	General Sessions
	9 Gay Parker
	18 Janice Johnson
	29 Kim Davenport

Cheers...

Oh, baby! If our courthouse family keeps getting larger, we can start our own nursery. Three more births to talk about since our last report. **Bill Cartwright** and wife **Tracy** became two-daughter parents on June 16 with the arrival of **Mikayla Monroe Cartwright** at Baptist Hospital. The younger sister of **Miss Kelsey Lynn Cartwright** weighed in at 7.5 1/2, stretched neatly over a 19-inch frame. Mom hopes to return to her circuit court clerk's job next month. Dad is already back at work in our Traffic Violations warrant office...While the Cartwrights were welcoming their newest family member, the event was being duplicated across town at Summit Hospital with the arrival of **Andrea Nicole Gibson**, third daughter of **Casey Gibson** (he's a deputy probate clerk) and wife **Dena**. The new arrival measured 22 inches in length and weighed 6-6 1/2. Complications delayed her trip home a couple of weeks before she finally got to meet sisters **Robin** and **Kelsie**...Meantime, **Lynn Woods** and wife **Kelly** were fine-tuning their diaper-changing skills on new son **Jackson Ray Woods**, who made his debut on May 1 at a whopping 10 1/2 pounds. The proud papa is the son of **Sue DuMont** and brother of **Stacey Woods** of our Traffic Violations Bureau...Employees of our circuit court office said goodbye this month to fellow workers **Kathy Garrett** and **Keith Byrd**, who left to pursue other interests. Ms. Garrett is relocating in northern California and Byrd has accepted a position with Matrix, a product display company...Things are hectic these days in the **Phil York** household as the Traffic Violations business manager and wife **Linda** prepare for the August 5 wedding of daughter **Kelly** to beau **Barry Brewer**. The couple will tie the knot at Grace Baptist Church on Old Hickory Boulevard and fellow workers of both parents have been invited to attend the 7 p.m. ceremony.

...Tears

Attorney **Robert C. Taylor**, who died on June 22 from cancer, was one of the legal community's outstanding leaders whose political expertise guided the successful gubernatorial ambitions of **Frank Clement** and **Buford Ellington**. As a student at Vanderbilt, he displayed his own competitive prowess on the football field and in the classroom where he earned a law degree that eventually led to his association with the prestigious law firm of **Trabue, Sturdivant & DeWitt**. At the age of 64, he left us much too soon. But we shall long benefit from his legacy.