

Clerks Corner – December 2016

IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN!

In anticipation of the New Year, Wenham residents will be receiving forms in the mail for the 2017 census and dog registration. Our dog licenses are valid for the calendar year so residents are able to register their dogs when they complete the census. Compliance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 140 Section 137 ensures the safety and health of our dogs as well as the community at large because it requires a current rabies vaccination. Please note that our bylaw assesses a \$25 late fee per dog as of February 1st.

In 1787, the Founding Fathers wrote Article 1 Section 2 of the US Constitution which mandated a decennial census to apportion political representation, but it was way back in the 1600's that Massachusetts instituted the annual census. Here in our small Town of Wenham, attempting to pinpoint the number of residents and households annually is a moving target, so I venture to say that the decennial census is even harder to accurately nail down.

Often, citizens question the Clerk's office as to whether their answers to census might be used against them, particularly in regards to taxation, military and jury service and immigration. Admittedly, there were times in our history when the government had been given access to the census data however; this has not been true since 1947 when legal protection of confidential census data was restored.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts maintains the security of our system in accordance with current data security laws. There are specially protected classes of residents whose names do not appear on the public street list, information about minors under the age of seventeen is never released to the public and there are no social security numbers or financial information tied to the census. Although the law has been amended over the years, taking a yearly count of residents is still required by Massachusetts General Law Chapter 51 Section 4.

As per this law, the Clerk must compile the resident count into a street list. The street list can then be used to establish residency for any number of things such as in-state tuition, job and adoption applications to name a few. The collected data is also utilized by other state and local agencies. Compiling the street list not only allows us maintain an accurate voter list but it provides information for the Office of Jury Commissioner. Our accurate census is the reason why Massachusetts produces the "gold standard" of Juror Lists which do not exclude any given population which could have profound consequences on criminal convictions and civil verdicts. The School Department uses these statistics to project future levels of school enrollment. The Council on Aging uses the data to apply for grants and estimate demands for programs and services. The Veterans Agent can notify local Veterans of services available to them. Census data is important for many different reasons.

Thank you for returning your completed census to the Clerk's office in person, by mail or email as soon as possible.

And of course, my wish for the season is that we all find health, happiness, fun and peace now and into the New Year!

Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Wenham Town Clerk April 11, 2014. For more information on the clerk's office, please go to www.wenhamma.gov or follow the Wenham Town Clerk on Facebook.